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# Student Voting Behavior at The University of Akron

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Student Voting Behavior at The University of Akron

Turner Anderson

## **Introduction**

On April 1, 2015, Ohio's governor John Kasich used his line item veto power to strike down a provision in a transportation bill that would require out-of-state students to acquire an Ohio driver's license or other Ohio-specific identification documents in order to vote in in state elections. This was seen as a major victory for college students, whose voting behavior scares many politicians and in particular Republicans, who seem to believe that college students will only vote for Democrats. After the significant public outcry from people both young and old, even the Republicans had to back down from limiting the collegiate vote. The amount of notice and controversy this small piece of a bill caused shows just how important the college vote can be to politicians.

This paper sets out to examine the voting behavior of students, particularly those students at The University of Akron. Using precinct data, it was determined that students that live on or near The University of Akron's campus do, in fact, vote less frequently than the rest of the precincts in the city of Akron by a large margin. In order to determine whether this low voter turnout is a student issue or an Akron issue, the same methodology was applied to Toledo, finding that Akron was far below Toledo in terms of student voter turnout. After establishing these points, the paper suggests policy changes that may close this gap in voter participation between The University of Akron and other universities in the state.

## **Literature Review**

In order to understand why or why not students at The University of Akron, or college students in general for that matter, vote we need to understand the current trends among this segment of the population. With the literature review, we will seek to understand the political

personality of this generation, their potential structural obstacles to voting and then what factors can help us predict whether students will actually vote.

### History

Young adults (aged 18-24) are among the least understood political actors in society. In 1972, the minimum age required to vote was lowered from 21 to 18. At that time, voter turnout was slightly above 50 percent and this age group made up about 18 percent of the electorate, but the participation rate was on the decline until 1996, bottoming out at around a 35 percent participation rate and a makeup of 7.6 percent of the electorate (CIRCLE, 2013). This decrease in political activity among the younger generation left many scratching their heads, and led to many studies on the topic. Many of the papers and articles that came around the turn of the century characterized young adults as lazy, apathetic, and disinterested in politics (Longo & Meyer, 2006).

Surprisingly, this trend reversed itself starting around 2000, and since then voter turnout has been on the rise for those under the age of 24, returning to near the same participation levels as the inception of the 18 years of age requirement in 2008. In 2008, under-thirties as a whole represented a greater portion of the electorate than people over the age of 65 (Lipka & Wiedeman, 2008). Since this population is becoming a more important voting bloc, the parties have become increasingly interested and anxious to figure out what makes this population vote or not vote. Considering the turnout for those 25 and older was 23.6 percent higher than that of those under the age of 25, it seems that there is much work to do in getting this voting bloc to participate as much as it could.

Examining this group of citizens has proven to be difficult because of the vast differences in walks of life that one can find among them. Some young adults are getting married, some of them have children, some are single parents, some are attending college, others are practicing a trade, while still others are unemployed. Research has proven that those who vote once have a much higher likelihood of voting again, and so if we want to mobilize this bloc of voters, we would do well to focus on the first time they would be eligible to vote at the age of 18. Since a majority of today's young adults enroll in a university upon graduation of high school, I will analyze the impact a university can have on a college student's potential to participate in democracy through voting (Longo & Meyer, 2006). This paper will examine in general what holds students back from and encourages voting, and how a student's university can help them participate and become more engaged citizens. In particular, this paper will focus on The University of Akron, and give suggestions on policy changes and initiatives that could help the university produce more civically engaged students. For this portion of the paper, I will speak from my unique perspective as the most recent Intern for Voter Engagement through the Department of Student Life.

When young adults gained the right to vote in 1972, those with some college experience aged 18-29 participated in the election at an impressive rate of 72.5 percent; however, this rate has consistently fallen until today, where the most recent data from the 2012 presidential election presents a mere 55.9 percent participation rate among those with some college experience (CIRCLE, 2013). Universities pride themselves on being the center of ideas and intellectual exchange, and one would assume that if this were true, those who attend said universities would be among the most involved citizens. Considering reality says otherwise, it should be a high priority of universities to encourage their students to become participants once again.

Though the nation is concerned with the student vote and its impacts on national and particularly presidential elections, it is also important to note the potential for students to dominate local politics. Voting laws in Ohio allow students at The University of Akron to register at their campus housing with relative ease; however, turnout rates for most areas that would be considered “student living” had dismal turnout rates in 2014. The University of Akron is home to 25,865 students, of which 24,474 are citizens and are eligible to vote. To put this in perspective, in Ward 1 where a majority of students that live on or near campus are housed only approximately 2,000 votes were cast in 2013 (Summit County Board of Elections, 2015). Further, the campus is represented by Ohio House District 34, and in 2014 only 24,000 votes were cast in that race. It is clear, then, that The University of Akron could become a dominant voice in regional politics if it does a better job mobilizing its student body.

### Generational Dynamics

One of the landmark studies on student opinion in regards to politics was *College Students Talk Politics* which was published in 1993. This study laid the basis for what is perceived to be the typical view that college students view politics as “individualistic, divisive, negative, and often counterproductive to the ills of society” and other studies to say that “this generation of college students is cynical and distrustful of government, apathetic and indifferent toward public affairs, unknowledgeable about politics, self-centered, and generally unconcerned with society” (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 2;5). Obviously the authors of these articles did not hold much hope for what college students would do politically, and were quite disappointed in the engagement that they were seeing within this population. The problem here is that this research is now almost two decades old, and though today’s college students have to bear the burden of media attacks due to

the sloth of college students in the 1990's, most recent studies say something completely different about the engagement of students today.

If college students in the 1990's were characterized by political pessimism, apathy, and conceit then today's students can be characterized as optimistic, caring, and community minded. In 2006, the Associated Press released a poll that found that those under the age of 30 were 19 percent more likely to trust that the government was spending money wisely when it came to funds allocated for the renewal and cleaning of the Gulf Coast than all other age groups. Four other surveys have indicated a reversal in the trend of apathy in that students are "more interested in politics, believed voting was a civic duty, and were less cynical and apathetic" (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 5). Even more telling was a Harvard poll which found that 64 percent of students expected to be more politically involved than their parents. If this is truly the case, then why is this age group still one of the lowest in terms of voter turnout, and what are they doing with this civic-mindedness?

Most studies and research are finding that students today are focusing more of their efforts locally. Rather than getting caught up in the fervor of presidential elections, students prefer, and are choosing to, make differences in their communities rather than spending their energy in what they see as largely irrelevant elections. In 2001, three in four graduated high school students reported having volunteered during their time in high school, an increase of 13 percent over the rate reported in 1976 (Longo & Meyer, 2006). Further, 2005 surveys showed that students were planning to volunteer during their college years at a rate higher than ever had previously been reported. This dissonance has baffled researchers who have found that college students today have a paradoxical combination of moral idealism and optimism and political cynicism (Longo & Meyer, 2006). Students, not trusting politicians to get the job done, have

decided to put matters into their own hands and turn to community service as their alternative to politics.

This generation has also provided many examples of students using their political influence at their respective universities to drive change. One such example is a campaign at Harvard University to convince their university to pay its campus workers a higher wage, which led to raises for many workers (Longo & Meyer, 2006). Another example includes a number of universities whose students lobbied to have their university endowments divest from businesses whose practices are linked to discrimination, poor labor environments, and genocide. Many universities also saw movements to remove Chick-Fil-A from their campuses in the past five years as a reaction to their perceived anti-LGBTQ stances. This generation is not afraid to vote with their pocket books, and to remind those at their university that they are an important voice. What I believe this illustrates is a desire and aptitude for this generation to solve societal problems, and it signals to me that we need to reconsider how we market voting to this generation. We may be able to better reach 18-24 year olds if we make it clear just how big of an impact they can make on the local and state levels, since it seems that they may have already thrown in the towel on national politics.

### Predicting the College Vote

One of the biggest struggles when it comes to analyzing the college vote is that we for a long time had no good formulas for predicting voter turnout among college students. One of the biggest struggles is that we do not know which students will be the ones that end up voting. With other segments of the population, there is vast data about whether they have ever voted before, and the parties use this information to target their work towards those who have voted since



studies have shown that those are the most likely citizens to vote again. College students are typically participating in their very first presidential election, so though we know they have never voted in a presidential election before this data tells us absolutely nothing in regards to how they are going to behave in the future.

Further issues include the use of factors such as mobility and education level to help inform the likelihood of college students to vote. Students do not fit nicely into the categories that survey-makers create when they do questionnaires for elections. For example, when surveys ask what education level I have, I often find myself debating whether I should check the box “Some College” or “College” now that I am only two months from graduation. Though there will likely be differences between those who completed a degree and those who completed only a few years of college down the road, there is no magic process by which students minds transform when they walk across the stage at graduation. As a result, these variables meant to help determine a person’s likelihood to vote were useless for college students, so that is why Niemi and Hanmer in 2010 published *Voter Turnout Among College Students: New Data and a Rethinking of Traditional Theories*. This work sought to determine if indeed there should be new demographic characteristics to inform us about the college student vote.

What Niemi and Hanmer found was that there are many variables that impact a student’s likelihood to vote. Few of the “old variables” (solely gender) was shown to have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of a student to vote (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). The survey of 1,200 found that two of the best indicators of a student’s likelihood to vote were whether they had been mobilized by a political party (defined in their research as having received mail/email or in person contact with the parties) and whether a student had the potential to vote in a battleground state, whether that be their university address or home address. The survey also

found that math, science, engineering, and psychology majors had a lower likelihood of voting than other majors at a university.

One of the most interesting findings was in regards to what caused students not to vote. As was established earlier, there are many perceived structural issues when it comes to registering and voting for college students; however, only 4 percent of students reported that “I tried to register but was unable to” when given the option in the survey (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 312). Another common belief is that students often do not vote because they missed the deadline to register. The Niemi and Hanmer study found that there was little, if any, reason to believe that states who allowed Election Day registration actually saw a higher turnout for students in voting. Though the study may say otherwise, I still believe that structural issues may be a problem, largely because the survey response provided (“I tried to register but was unable to”) first assumes that the student tried to register. It is quite possible that the perceived obstacles to registering deter students from attempting to register in the first place, and such students would not respond in the expected way to this survey question. Further, some of the above-cited structural issues had more to do with actual voting than they had to do with registration, and many were morally bankrupt and deserved attention regardless of their impact on student turnout.

### Potential Structural Obstacles

There are many potential obstacles when it comes to registering and voting as a student. Among the biggest issues is the odd nature of campus addresses. At one college in Iowa, 50 students had to cast provisional ballots because they used their school’s general address when registering rather than specific residence hall addresses (Lipka & Wiedeman, 2008). This same

issue exists at The University of Akron, where the issue is threefold for students. First, the legislature in its infinite wisdom divided campus among two different Congressional districts. This means that students have to pay special attention to their address and two students who both live “on-campus” will likely vote in different locations and for different candidates. Further, it is nearly impossible to come up with a physical address for some of the residence halls on campus such as Ritchie or Bulger, as these halls do not sit on a road and cannot be given a street number easily. The solution I was given when I asked for help with this conundrum was to simply use the campus mailing address for my physical address on my voter registration form, which brings us to the third issue. Students have different physical and mailing addresses, which makes it more confusing to fill out the registration forms, and if you would listen to the advice to sign up at your mailing address would result in an invalid registration since the campus mailing address is a P.O. Box. These issues all add up to make the registration process confusing for students, and the mailing process difficult for Boards of Elections. Anecdotally, I did not receive any confirmation via campus mail on where to vote, nor did I ever receive materials on absentee ballots through Akron’s TurboVote system, and I’m guessing it has to do with the way students receive, or do not receive, mail on campus.

Though the above can be chalked up to simply bureaucratic messiness, there have also been more sinister attempts to stifle collegiate voting. For example, some students in Arizona had to argue their legitimacy and avoid voting provisionally because their driver’s license address was different from their campus address (Lipka & Wiedeman, 2008). Further, officials have claimed in at least one state that “poll watchers were strategically placed at polling stations in precincts with high percentages of college students and charged with the task of challenging their eligibility” (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 305). Finally, there have been reports in recent

years of students receiving mass mailers disguised as coming from their university or members of the administration. Students at George Mason University, and colleges across the country received messages that voting had been pushed back a day for one reason or another on the morning of Election Day (Lipka & Wiedeman, 2008). Though this internet-savvy generation is not dumb enough to be fooled by such blatant deceit, I think it speaks well to the mind set of many that the collegiate vote is to be feared, and I think this is largely because parties simply do not know how students will vote. It seems as though both Republicans and Democrats have decided that students are too unpredictable to be seen as real targets for their campaigning, and have instead resorted to suppressing them as much as possible.

As stated above, The University of Akron does struggle with the odd nature of campus addresses. Further, the Niemi and Hammer study found that students who were engaged by political parties had a higher likelihood to vote. Politicians have a difficult time reaching students at Akron because they are not allowed to solicit on campus or in residence halls. Further, campus is split into multiple districts which make it less worthwhile to invest time reaching our students. Given that The University of Akron struggles with so many of these issues that may inhibit student voting, it seemed natural to examine whether the campus did have a low voter turnout as the literature would suggest.

## **Methodology**

In this section, I will attempt to establish that there is a difference between the voting behavior in those precincts encompassing The University of Akron's campus and the city of Akron as a whole. To do this, I have pulled precinct data from the Canvass results for the 2010, 2012, and 2014 elections (Summit County Board of Elections, 2015). Using this data, I found the

number of registered voters, the number of votes cast, and then the voter turnout for each precinct in the city. The data for the whole city was also easily pulled from these reports.

In order to determine which precincts are “student” precincts and which are not, I have obtained maps of precincts for the city of Akron and have determined those precincts which contain within them student housing. I considered student housing to be: on-campus residence halls, University Edge, Fir Hill, Envision Apartments, The Depot, 22 Exchange, 401 Lofts, and south of campus houses. The precincts in Akron have changed three times since 2008, so the precincts that contained student housing within them changed each election. In 2010, The Depot, University Edge, 401 Lofts, and 22 Exchange had yet to be built, so the precincts that contained student housing were only precincts 2-C and 5-H (Summit County Board of Elections, 2015). In 2012, the precincts were changed, and more apartment complexes had been built, so the precincts containing student living were 2-B, 2-D, and 5-F. In 2014, precincts changed yet again and the University Edge apartments and The Depot were operational, in this election the precincts containing student living were 1-B, 1-M, 3-M, 3-N, 5-N, and 5-M.

I chose to compare percentages of voter turnout rather than number of registered voters in a precinct for a couple of reasons. First, studies have shown that only about 30 percent of students chose to register at their university (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). This means that 70 percent of students vote at their homes, and short of a statistically valid survey of students on campus there is no way to capture their voting behavior in this study. For those students that choose to register at their university, we can determine their voting behavior by seeing the turnout rates for the precincts in which they are registered. Since most of these precincts in question encompass something like four residence halls and a lot of empty space, it is fair to say that they are predominantly student.

After presenting this data comparing the campus precincts to the city of Akron in table format, I have graphed all the precincts in the city to show the voting behavior of the city as a whole. This graph should help show the difference between campus precincts and the average precinct in the city. The graph compares the number of registered voters to the number of votes cast in each precinct. I also ran a line through the scatter plot that represents the average voter turnout for each election, which means that any point below the line is worse than average, and those above are better than average. Further, the distance from this line is how far from the average the precinct is. I then circled those precincts that touched campus in red to highlight their difference from the rest of the city.

After obtaining these results, I decided that it would be useful to compare The University of Akron to another university. Kent State seemed like the natural campus for comparison, but I could not obtain maps for their area. As a result, I settled on the University of Toledo, which is another competitor campus within the state. Further, the campus is similar to Akron in that it is an urban university with many commuters.

## Results

Data on the number of registered voters and votes cast for each precinct compared to the city of Akron are as follows:

**Table 1 - 2010 Election**

	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Percent Turnout
Precinct 2-C	984	69	7.01%
Precinct 5-H	1441	127	8.81%
City of Akron	130222	53557	41.13%

Table 2 - 2014 Election

	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Percent Turnout
Precinct 1-B	541	330	5.55%
Precinct 1-M	716	33	4.61%
Precinct 3-M	550	52	9.45%
Precinct 3-N	554	59	10.65%
Precinct 3-L	865	105	12.14%
City of Akron	122056	38534	31.57%

I grouped 2010 and 2014 together because both elections are non-presidential years and one would therefore expect the turnout to be less than in 2012. This table shows clearly that campus precincts voted at a substantially lower rate than the city of Akron as a whole in 2010 and 2014. Some of the campus precincts also voted at abysmally low rates of four to five percent. What is even more telling is that precincts 1-B and 1-M are the two precincts in 2014 that contain main campus and all the residence halls. The only other “outsiders” that may have been registered in these precincts were those who live in Fir Hill or other apartment complexes, but did not attend the university. The question then is, does this trend also occur in presidential years?

Table 3 - 2012 Election

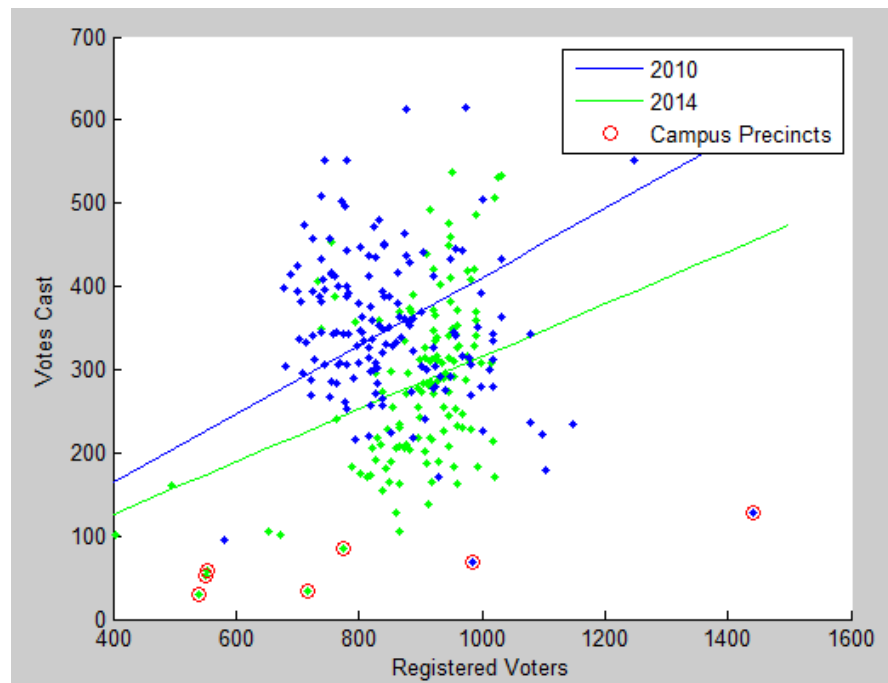
	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Percent Turnout
Precinct 2-B	1439	587	40.79%
Precinct 2-D	1552	645	41.56%
Precinct 5-F	1744	652	37.39%
City of Akron	128696	86680	67.35%

It looks like campus did a much better job with voter turnout in 2012 than it did in either of the previous years; however, campus still lagged far behind the city of Akron as a whole. I ran a  $\chi^2$  distribution to see if the campus precincts in all years were significantly different than the average precinct in the city of Akron and the lowest calculated test statistic was 27.3, which still

confirms that the campus precincts are different than the city of Akron with over 99.9 percent certainty.

While these numbers are interesting, it is hard to visualize just how different the campus precincts are than the rest of the city of Akron. In order to properly show the difference, I plotted all the precincts in Akron in a scatter plot and then circled the points corresponding to campus precincts in red. The first graph contains data from both 2010 and 2014, since they are similar in the turnout rate for each.

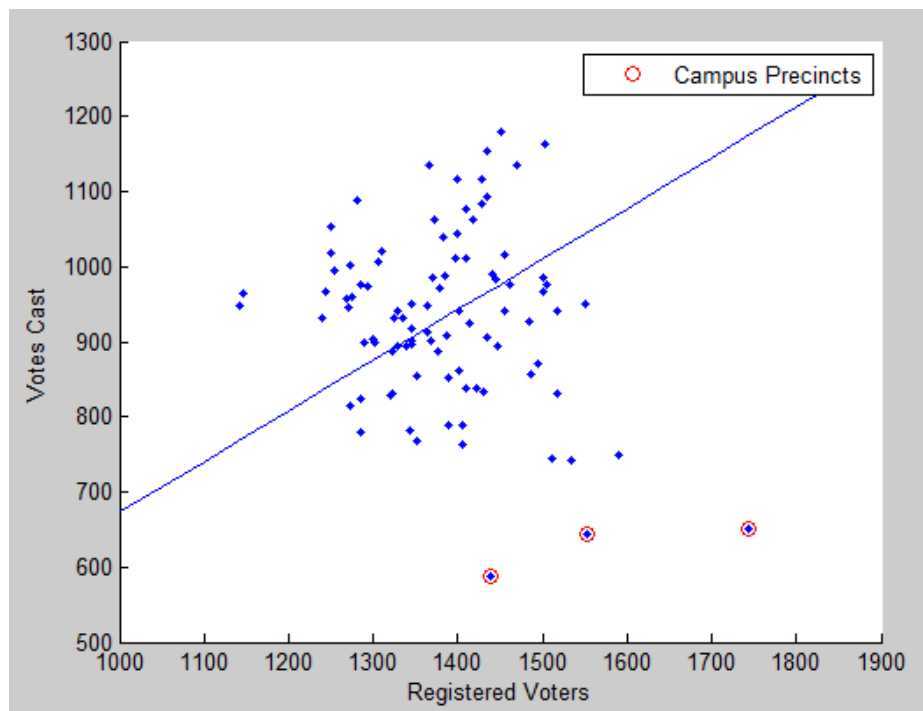
Figure 1 - 2010 and 2014 Elections



Notice how much lower the voter turnout was in campus precincts compared to other precincts in the city. Interestingly, the precinct 5-H in 2010 had the highest number of registered voters in the entire city, yet had the second lowest number of votes cast. Again, we will look at the 2012 presidential election to see if anything is different:



Figure 2 - 2012 Election

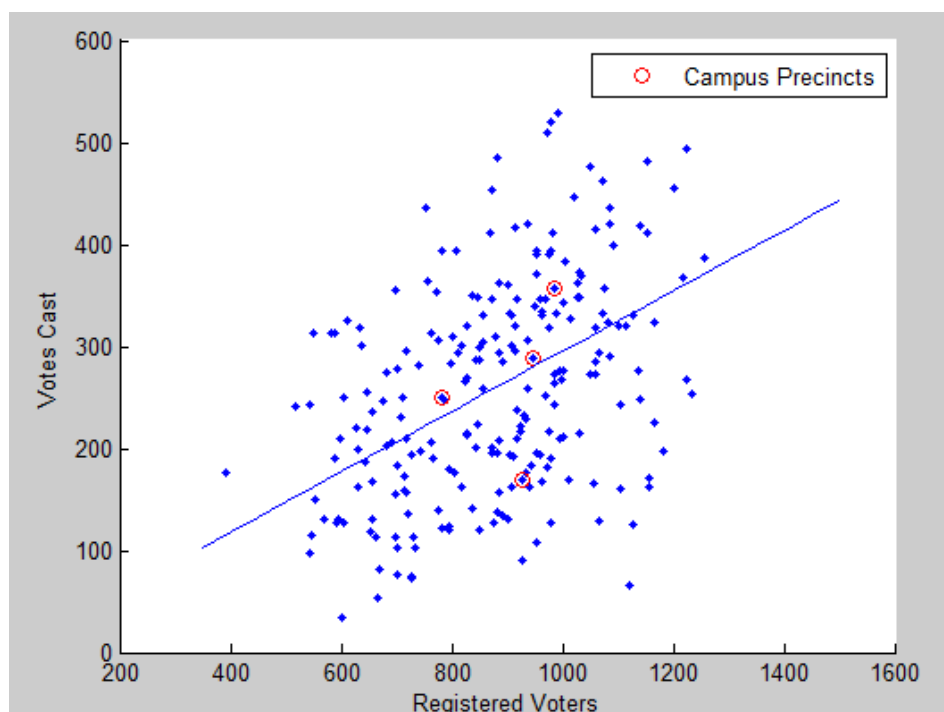


The story is very similar to the previous two elections. This time, campus held the three lowest votes cast and voter turnout rates in the city while also having the precinct with the highest number of registered voters.

All of these tables and graphs indicate that there is something fundamentally different about campus precincts when compared to other precincts within the city of Akron. Typically, this would be blamed on the fact that students just vote less than other people, and that students at The University of Akron tend to vote in their hometowns instead. There are a few problems with this. First, this research only counts those who have already registered to vote, and if a student registers to vote at their campus address, this is a fairly good indication that campus is the location they would vote if they were going to vote. Further, if we say that those registered but not voting are not University of Akron students, then that means there is something very

different about those families that live near campus, and this seems a farfetched conclusion to draw. The biggest problem with the “students just do not vote” argument, is that it is simply untrue. I gathered data from the University of Toledo in the 2014 election, and using the same methodology I determined there were 4 precincts containing student housing. When I plotted their precincts along with their campus precincts, I obtained this graph:

Figure 3 - University of Toledo 2014



A graph like this is what I expected to see for The University of Akron when I began this research. I originally planned to simply offer suggestions on how we can improve and be a leader in student turnout. This graph changed all of that, and showed that there is not only a significant difference between those precincts at The University of Akron compared to the city of Akron, but also a difference between The University of Akron’s precincts and The University of Toledo’s precincts. This data suggests that on top of all the issue facing normal students and their

ability to vote, that there may also be some structural barrier to students voting at The University of Akron. Though this study does not have the ability to determine what precisely is the cause of this disparity in voting, I will consider a number of possible causes and give suggestions on how The University of Akron can help develop more civically engaged students.

### **Reasons for Low Turnout at Akron**

As a student voter myself, there are a few difficulties with being a student voter that I can speak to. I believe that the single most impactful obstacle to student voting is that students have not been receiving election notices. In my three plus years as a registered voter on campus, I have never received an election notice letting me know the date of the election and the location of my precinct. I know that the Summit County Board of Elections sends them out, but I know of no student who has ever received one. I am currently investigating the potential cause of this, and whether this is a Board of Elections issue or a University of Akron issue, and will hopefully have an answer and solution in the coming months.

Another frustrating issues facing students is that of mobility, for example, I have changed addresses five times in the past four years, even though I have considered campus home for all of them. This is a problem common to most all students, as we change our residence regularly. As a result, a student must update their address at the Board of Elections regularly, and because campus is split into multiple districts, wards and precincts, a student who moves a few blocks may find themselves voting in a new location for new people. Another issue is related to the findings of Niemi and Hanmer that students have higher turnout rates when they are mobilized by parties. Many students live in on-campus housing or apartments where solicitation is illegal.

The University of Akron considers political campaigns to be solicitation, as do many of the other apartment complexes, and as such campaigns are not able to contact students nearly as easily.

Further, as stated above the University of Akron is divided into multiple Congressional and state representative districts. As a result, campaigns have less to gain by bringing their efforts to campus. Campus could be a voting bloc of about 6,000 (assuming that our campus is similar to those in the Niemi and Hanmer campuses where 30 percent of students opted to vote on campus), but instead is separated into two or three districts. If campus voted in just one race, the 6,000 plus potential voters would be a force that campaigns could not ignore; however, due to the separation of these 6,000 students into multiple districts the 2,000-3,000 students available to a campaign by visiting Akron can be largely ignored. This is especially true when considering the difficulty a campaign will have in reaching those students even after gearing efforts towards reaching campus.

### **Suggest Policy Changes**

So, we have seen that students turn out in lesser numbers than the general population, and we have seen that this effect is especially pronounced at The University of Akron's campus. So what can be done to combat these issues? I will first talk broadly about solutions that other universities and organizations have employed, and then talk specifically about some that could and should be done here at The University of Akron. One of the most obvious solutions in light of the fact that students who experience outreach from the parties vote more often is that the parties have begun employing "dedicated campus organizers" (Issenberg, 2014). Similarly, nonpartisan organizations have sprung up such as the New Voters Project which aims to get students to become voting members of society (Carpini & Frishberg, 2005). Other ways that

campuses have attempted to encourage voting is by hiring DJs and convincing other celebrities to be at the polls on Election Day. Further, many campuses have a precinct that is located on campus. At the end of the day, many of the authors I read agreed, universities should do more to encourage their students to vote.

At the University of Akron, there are a number of things that can be done to increase the likelihood that students both register and vote. I will attempt to arrange these policy suggestions by both impact and ease of implementation, with a table at the end summarizing these suggestions. The most urgent suggestion is to determine why our students are not receiving election notices like the rest of the electorate does. Such a lack of information would hurt any population's turnout rate, and this is especially so for a vulnerable population like students. It is possible that this has to do with the way campus addresses are formulated or a glitch at the Board of Elections, but either way this is a very urgent matter that affects anyone registered on campus.

The easiest recommendation is that The University of Akron determines what the physical address shall be for all of their residence halls, and makes this information easily available to students. In doing so, the university may also want to work with the Summit County Board of Elections in order to assure that these addresses will not be disputed. The biggest culprits are Bulger, Spanton, Ritchie, and Sisler as these residence halls are not along a street. Administrators must be knowledgeable of the fact that P.O. boxes are not eligible addresses for students to establish residency, or they risk unintentionally disenfranchising their students. When determining these addresses, the university should also determine the four digit postal code extension, because this is a necessary component of an address if a student would ever have the desire to contact their representative.

The next easiest recommendation to implement I discovered through my literature review. At Oregon State University, voter registration is a cornerstone of the first-year experience (Carpini & Frishberg, 2005). They provide voter and absentee applications at orientations, week of welcome events, and during class registration time with their advisers. Having worked as the Voter Engagement Intern, I believe that registration is a very important part of the university's role in civic education. I was under the impression that most students who came to university would have already been registered as a part of their high school education, but as I visited many Akron Experience classes as part of my position, I found that only about half of our freshmen students are registered voters. This fact was a shock to me, as I think most would assume that registration is not something that universities really need to worry about. This recommendation has the potential to also save the university money. The university currently utilizes the TurboVote tool, which is supposed to aid in the registration of students; however, if we simply had paper forms available as a part of orientation when registering students for classes, move-ins, New Roo Weekend, and RooFest we could reach students as easily and conveniently. This is especially true if we offered to mail them for students who returned their registration on the day they received it.

The third recommendation to The University of Akron is to work with the Summit County Board of Elections to establish a precinct on The University of Akron's campus that can service at least those students who live on or near campus. Students who live on campus or in the University Edge apartments currently vote at First United Methodist Church on East Mill Street. On the other hand, those students who live in 22 Exchange, Envision Apartments, 401 Lofts, The Depot, or in houses south of campus vote at Leggett Elementary School on East Thornton Street. These students are currently in precincts 1-B, 1-M, 3-M, 3-N, and 3-L (Summit County Board of

Elections, 2015). I recommend that The University of Akron host its own precinct servicing wards 1 and 3 on campus. If students were able to vote in the Student Union Ballrooms, there would be no confusion as to where they should go on Election Day. Further, hosting a precinct on campus makes the statement very clear that The University of Akron cares about their student's votes and is doing all they can to make it easy for them to vote in the face of the many disadvantages they face. In my opinion, this is one of the most important changes, because such a change would both increase the ease of voting and impact the culture of campus towards one that values its civic responsibilities. I would be shocked if we hosted a precinct and then proceeded to ignore our responsibility to help mobilize our students.

The fourth recommendation is that The University of Akron continues to have an intern for voter engagement and continue to support their efforts. Though it is difficult to quantify the impact made in just one year, I believe that one event in particular that was developed last fall has the potential to accomplish a number of goals that can help mobilize our student body. This event was called the Candidate Open House. I invited those candidates, or their campaign staffs, who may appear on a typical Akron student's ballot to come to the Student Union and staff a table, providing both candidates and students with a platform to meaningfully engage one another. As I have repeated a number of times, contact from the political parties increases the chances that students vote (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). Further, from my own anecdotal experiences and smaller surveys of student populations, it seems that one of the most common reason students do not vote is they do not feel knowledgeable enough to cast a vote meaningfully. An event like the open house really helps to solve these issues, and if it continues to grow, could be seen as a necessary stop for campaigns in the area. Those who attended the event, both students and candidates, were very positive about the impact of the event, and most

said they would like to attend such an event in the future. This event has great potential, and I urge the university to support the candidate open house, and the voter engagement intern to the utmost of its ability.

Fifth, I recommend that The University of Akron work with the state legislature and Board of Elections to allow student-identification cards to be accepted as a valid form of identification at polling locations. I must admit, this will be a difficult endeavor; but, we can look to Wisconsin and Maine to find success stories (Carpini & Frishberg, 2005). It would be quite the achievement if shortly after Governor Kasich vetoed a bill requiring students to obtain more identification if we were able to devise a system where students were able to use their ZipCard to vote on Election Day.

Finally, in order to successfully encourage its students to vote The University of Akron, and all universities for that matter, must recognize and commit to its role in the civic education and civic engagement of its students. The civic engagement of its students should be a mission of the entirety of a university, and should be something that all participate in. During my internship, I feel there were times that I learned more about university politics than the election that I was supposed to be educating my fellow students about. The political science department and the department of student life struggled to cooperate, and because of this students ultimately suffered. One of the best examples of this was the political science department's unwillingness to come alongside the Candidate Open House and encourage their students and faculty members to attend. I remember one candidate in particular at the open house saying to me "you would think that there would be more political science students here because the department would give them extra credit or something to attend."



These two departments, though, are not the only ones who should be bearing the burden of civic education. Political science professors and student life employees only have so much reach, and will certainly not be able to engage all students on campus themselves. The mission of engaging students in the political process should be one embraced by all on campus, especially in those areas where students traditionally do not vote. In particular, psychology, engineering, science, and math students may never set foot in a political science classroom, and are statistically the population of students most at risk to not vote (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). Professors of these students and their academic departments should go out of their way to encourage students to vote in and out of the classroom. This is likely the most difficult policy to implement, as it involves changing a culture on campus, and convincing those who view voting as “their turf” to concede that to all of campus, but if The University of Akron can convince most or all of its employees to take ownership of student’s civic education, then we could see substantial results.

**Table 4 - Policy Suggestions**

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Ease of Implementation</b>	<b>Impact on Registration</b>	<b>Impact on Voter Turnout</b>
Figure out why students are not receiving election notices	Moderately Difficult	None	Very High
Determine addresses for residence halls	Very Easy	Moderate	Moderate
Make voter registration a part of orientation, Week of Welcome, and move-ins	Easy	High	None
Put a precinct on campus	Moderate	Low	High
Support Voter Engagement Intern and the Candidate Open House	Easy	High	High
Allow campus IDs to be used as voter identification	Very Difficult	None	Moderate
Establish voter engagement as a mission of the entire university	Difficult	High	High

## Conclusion

Through this research, it was recognized that The University of Akron is a school whose students are less politically engaged than students at The University of Toledo. More research could be done to gather profiles on a number of universities around the country and their student's voting behavior. With this information, one may find that The University of Akron is more of a normal school and The University of Toledo is an outlier. This type of data would be important in that it would also help establish trends between universities and help researchers notice what those schools with low voter engagement have in common that drives their student's to have less political activity than other universities. This information would be invaluable in helping universities maintain or increase the voter turnout rates for students on their campus.

As part of my current job in campus, I have been looking back through old yearbooks. I have seen pictures of visits to The University of Akron from political icons like Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton. Just a few years ago, the Obama campaign also planned to visit The University of Akron as part of its campaign trail, but due to weather was forced to cancel. These visits are exciting, full of intrigue, and can attract students to our campus; however, these types of visits are under threat if the voter turnout rate of students on this campus continues to be a meager 5 percent. And who can blame politicians for ignoring populations that ignore them?

By most current research, today's college students should be among some of the most politically active individuals in society. They are more optimistic and trusting of government than other age groups, and they volunteer much more than students ever have before (Longo & Meyer, 2006). Though the percentage of this population who votes is growing, they are still among the least likely members of society to vote. Instead of falling back on decades old research that confirms biases that this generation is lazy and self-serving, society ought to

consider whether structural issues make it more difficult for this population to vote than previously considered.

Many things can be done outside of a university's control that could help this population vote as well. Districts could be drawn taking special care to universities and endeavoring to not split them up in multiple districts. Voter registration could be something that is done online. I even hope to live to see the day where voting itself is done online. Further, those who seek to smother the voice of college students must put a stop to their efforts, lest they damage the fabric of democracy for years to come.

Universities must embrace their role in the civic education of their students. Though it was once believed that students ought to be registered to vote before they graduate high school, it is clear that this is increasingly not the case. Universities are supposedly producing the best and brightest, and if this is the case, we should want these individuals to vote as much as possible. Universities are in a unique position as an intellectual and cultural cornerstone of society to produce lifelong voters, and to help create a democracy with high participation rates.

If there is one thing I learned from President Proenza about government, it was that universities are upset that governments continuously slash their budget at the state level. If students are not voting, then universities can lobby all they want in Columbus for changes to how the state funds universities, but who should listen when the affected group of individuals refuses to stand up for themselves. If universities more effectively mobilized their students, they would be a force to be reckoned with in Columbus. When students and universities spoke, both parties would listen if they relied on students to win their seat. There are many possible policies that The University of Akron could pursue in the hopes of encouraging their students to vote, but

none are more important than making it clear that voter engagement is not solely the goal of one individual, group, committee, or department, but the university as a whole.

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