



GW Faculty Toolkit

A Guide for Faculty and Staff to Talk about Voting with their Classes or Community

Introduction

We write today to ask you to remind your students to register and to vote in the November 2024 election. Providing registration and absentee voting information is a nonpartisan way to encourage participation in the electoral process.

This guide will walk you through the importance of the youth vote, the basics of voting, how to share voting information (with examples), how to encourage an informed vote, and additional resources for you or your class.

Talking about voting in your classroom may be new to you. We recognize that at this moment of political and economic tensions, talking about voting may be daunting. However, we think these new challenges only stress the importance of civic participation. **Know that you are in a powerful position to engage students in voting.** The research is clear that students are more likely to vote if someone close to them asks them to do so. You can be that trusted resource to provide relevant information to students and empower them to become democratically engaged.

If you only have a moment, please ask your students to register, request their absentee ballot, and vote; and let them know that GW Votes can support this journey.

What is GW Votes?

[GW Votes](#) is a nonpartisan coalition of students, faculty, and staff, supported by the [Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service](#), to promote voter registration, participation, and education among students.

GW Votes partners with [TurboVote](#), a web-based tool designed to help students register to vote, request absentee ballots, get election reminders, check their registration status, and so much more.

The whole process usually takes no more than 10 minutes. The [GW Votes TurboVote](#) link can be used in any classroom setting as an easy and effective way to help engage students in the democratic process.

Voting as a College Student

GW has been [recognized](#) as one of the most politically active schools in the nation – we consistently vote at a higher rate than our peers. In 2020, 69% of GW eligible students voted in the election compared to [66%](#) across all colleges. Nevertheless, youth ages 18 to 29 lag behind other age groups. In 2020 and 2022, this age group had the lowest turnout.

[Voting at GW](#)

Voting, registration & yield rates

In 2020, GW's voting rate was 69% – up 26% from 2018. Registration rate of all students also rose 3%.

By voting method

In 2020, 56% of GW students voted by mail/absentee ballot. Only 7% of students voted in person.

Education level/ year

Freshmen consistently vote at lower rates than their upperclassmen peers. It is especially important to discuss voting methods with first year students as it is their first time voting in college – or at all.

Field of study

In 2020, GW students in Natural Resources and Conservation Studies topped the list with 81% of students casting a ballot. Other above average majors include Gender Studies, History, and Architecture majors.

On the other hand, Mathematics and Statistics students voted at the lowest rate – 16%. Other below average majors include Business and Computer Science.

Why don't young people vote?

While GW students vote at higher rates than average college students, young people turn out to vote significantly less than older Americans. The four main [reasons](#) young people do not vote are:

- **They are not asked to vote:** Young people contacted by an organization, friend, or family are more likely to vote, but many are never contacted. Political campaigns, in particular, rarely reach out to young people because they are not on public voter rolls.
- **Barriers exist to them voting:** Young people need to register to vote when they turn 18 and then again every time they move, which they do more frequently than older Americans.
- **They feel they do not know enough to vote:** Over 20% of young people say they think they do not know enough to vote. The lack of comprehensive civic education for young people limits their understanding of the electoral process.
- **They're not interested in politics or feel their vote will not make a difference:** The newest generation feels apathetic to the political system and the candidates.

Why should young people vote in the 2024 Election?

With the majority of the House and Senate up for grabs, youth voters are going to be [especially important this election year](#). To say a lot has changed since the 2020 election is an understatement. Whether it's the last election's social issues of voting rights and climate, or the more recent developments of abortion bans and border laws, college students can use their own majority to cast votes for the future they want to see. Restrictions on AI, [deepfakes](#), and social media privacy bills are more relevant than ever. Between the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war and Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the international-stage will be an additional determinant for candidates reaching voters under 30. This generation presents as a crucial arena in the 2024 election and should be informed to use their votes accordingly.

Turning Out the Student Vote

Step 1: Helping Students Overcome the Barriers to Voting

The easiest way to get students to vote is to ask them. Students are more likely to vote when asked by someone they trust — like a professor. Since youth often face barriers in the registration and voting processes, it is important that you also give them helpful information on how to register and vote. Our free tool, [Turbovote](#), can help with that.

It is necessary to note that encouraging students to vote and giving them information on how to do so can and should be **nonpartisan**. We want to increase voter turnout for all our students, regardless of politics.

Understanding the basics of voting:

Voting in the United States can be confusing and different for all fifty states. Since [93%](#) of GW students are not from DC, it is important that they get information about how to cast an absentee ballot or vote early. Nevertheless, [Turbovote](#) takes care of all of this for students. Voters all complete the same basic process in order to vote:

1. **Be eligible to vote:** All U.S. citizens age 18 or older are eligible to vote unless they have lost their right through felony conviction in certain states.
2. **Register to Vote:** College students may choose to register at home or in their state of residence for college (DC), but most choose to register in their home state. States have different deadlines, but some are as early as **October 6, 2024**. Students may either register via mail or online, depending on the state; some states may require identification information (like a driver's license or social security number) to register.
3. **Cast their Ballot:** Finally, voters must cast their ballot to complete the process.
 - a. **In Person:** Students residing where they are registered to vote on election day can cast their ballot at their polling place during the hours set by their state. Some states also vote entirely by mail, so all voters will receive a ballot at the address at which they are registered.

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- b. **Early Voting:** Some jurisdictions allow individuals to vote shortly before election day at designated sites.
 - c. **Absentee:** Many students will vote by **absentee** ballot, a special type of mail-in ballot sent to voters who request a ballot because they cannot vote in person. Usually, students request absentee ballots because they are at GW on election day. In any case, their state will mail them their absentee ballot at any address requested. Students must then complete the ballot, seal it in an envelope, and, in most states, affix a stamp to mail to their election official. Most ballots must be postmarked by election day to be valid, but some states have stricter laws.

How to ask students to vote:

Below are a variety of tools you can use to help students vote. If possible, we ask that you let us know what tools you are using by completing this [form](#). You may also use the form to request further assistance from our team. Please share voting information as soon as possible to ensure students are able to register and/or request an absentee ballot by appropriate deadlines. Asking more than once in multiple formats is an effective way to get the message out.

Some students will be ineligible to vote for reasons like citizenship or age. Although unable to directly vote in the election, these students can still be a part of the political process by informing themselves on the issues or candidates. Resources like [Ballotpedia](#) can be helpful to show people what is on their area's ballot and start as a point of research. However, DC recently passed a law that noncitizens [can register and vote in local elections](#) – this may be an acceptable avenue for international or undocumented students.

Include In Lecture:

Devote time in your lecture to talk about voting. We have prepared [slides](#) that can be used for this purpose.

Talking points include:

- GW Votes is an initiative of the University to encourage voter turnout
 - Students should consider voting in 2024 to vote on issues that matter to them
 - Remind Students that they vote for positions besides President.
 - o House, Senate, City Council, State Officials are all on the ballot
 - Students can receive registration and absentee ballot assistance at gwu.turbovote.org
 - Students should register and request an absentee ballot ASAP if they are choosing to vote absentee. They should return the ballot as soon as possible. Otherwise, they should make a plan as to when to vote on November 5th, 2024.

If you prefer, a GW Votes Ambassador can join class to give a 5-10 minute presentation on the basics of registering to vote and casting a ballot. You can fill out the [Interest Form](#) here to be connected to our team.

Send An Email:

Consider sending an email to your entire class. An example of an email is below and at this [link](#).

Blackboard/ Syllabus:

Consider linking to [TurboVote](#) on your BlackBoard or other digital learning pages. A blurb could include:

GW encourages all of its eligible students to vote and have their voice heard in the 2024 election. You can use [TurboVote](#) (gwu.turbovote.org) to get assistance registering to vote, assistance requesting an absentee ballot to vote by mail, and reminders to vote. Questions can be directed to GW Votes at gwvotes@gwu.edu

Step 2: Encouraging Active and Knowledgeable Voters

Many students do not vote because they feel they are not knowledgeable enough to do so. Voting in the United States is logistically and practically complex. There are thousands of races around the country at the local, state, and federal levels, making it difficult for new voters to make an educated vote.

The following are helpful ways to talk to students about voting in a way that will encourage them to empower themselves to learn the process and cast a ballot they are proud of:

- **Discuss issues that are important to them:**
 - Older Americans are likely to be motivated to vote because they see themselves as “voters” or voting as an inherent good, but young people are more likely to vote when they feel empowered and think it will affect an issue that matters to them.
 - **Suggestions for faculty:**
 - Make connections between elections and social/political/economic issues in your lectures.
 - Assign writing or discussion prompts that allow students to research political issues relevant to the course and understand the impact the 2024 election may have on that issue.
 - For example, in a business or journalism course, you may ask students to examine the current debate in [congress over amending](#) the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make the publication of written news articles tax exempt and how it affects the business practices of newspaper companies.
 - Plan other classroom discussions or projects that make connections between classroom material and timely issues
 - For example, in a biology course, students research politicians’ policies for climate change and model how those plans may have an impact on aquatic life.
- **Emphasize voter education:** Almost [30%](#) of young people who do not vote say they don’t think they know enough to do so. When talking to students you can emphasize:

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- They have the right to vote, regardless of whether or not they know about everything on the ballot.
 - Multiple [nonpartisan resources](#) exist to learn about the issues on the ballot
 - **Suggestions for faculty:**
 - Assign research into political races and candidates as a way to teach research skills.
 - Analyze political coverage of races to teach media literacy.
 - Analyze candidates' websites for how they communicate on issues of science, business, statistics, or other relevant classroom topics
 - For example, in a writing course you could have students analyze candidates' websites to see how they use different rhetorical techniques to appeal to potential voters.

Resources

GW-Specific Data and Resources

- [GW All In Plan Voter Engagement Plan](#) submitted by GW Votes, guiding our strategy for 2024
- [GW NSLVE Report 2020](#): Provides data on GW student voter turnout in the last presidential election
- [GW NSLVE Report 2018/2014](#): Provides data on GW student voter turnout in the last two midterm elections

Voter Assistance Resources

- [CIRCLE](#), Tufts University: Provides academic research on youth participation in democratic institutions, including extensive reports on turnout data and reasonings behind these projections.
- [GW TurboVote](#): Voter registration and absentee ballot request forms, reminders, and information on changes to the voting process where they are registered.
- [Vote411.org](#): State-by-state guide to voting logistics as well as sample ballots and information on candidate platforms
- [Ballotready](#): Sample ballots and information on candidate platforms

Other Resources for Educators

- [All In Challenge](#) & [SLSV](#): All In's [Resource Hub](#) includes webinar series opportunities and campus engagement resources. Also included is SLSV's [Resources](#) guide.
- [Science Rising](#): Additional resources for STEM professors and students

Additional Questions?

For more information please reach out to GW Votes at gwvotes@gwu.edu.

About the Authors

This guide was put together with the help of the GW Votes Research Committee in the Spring of 2024:

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