



# **PRESIDENTIAL**

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# **LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**

## **IMPROVING PENN STATE STUDENT EFFICACY THROUGH INCREASED VOTER REGISTRATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE STATE COLLEGE BOROUGH**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Sustainability is an overarching concept that applies to a variety of societal issues. The United Nations has outlined 17 sustainable development goals regarding these issues, with the purpose of eventually reaching worldwide sustainable development. In the following policy paper, three specific policies are outlined in accordance with UN sustainability goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This goal was created in the hopes of “promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1). With the following proposed policies, it is believed that Penn State can improve student efficacy and political participation, therefore promoting a strong institution in which a variety of diverse voices are heard.

In the first policy, it is proposed that the university should form a coalition run by the University to encourage students to learn more about the importance of their civic duties and formulate activities to give students incentives to register to vote. Additionally, a system is outlined that would introduce a new benchmark of funding for club sports based on voter registration, which would also act as a precedent for other organizations at Penn State.

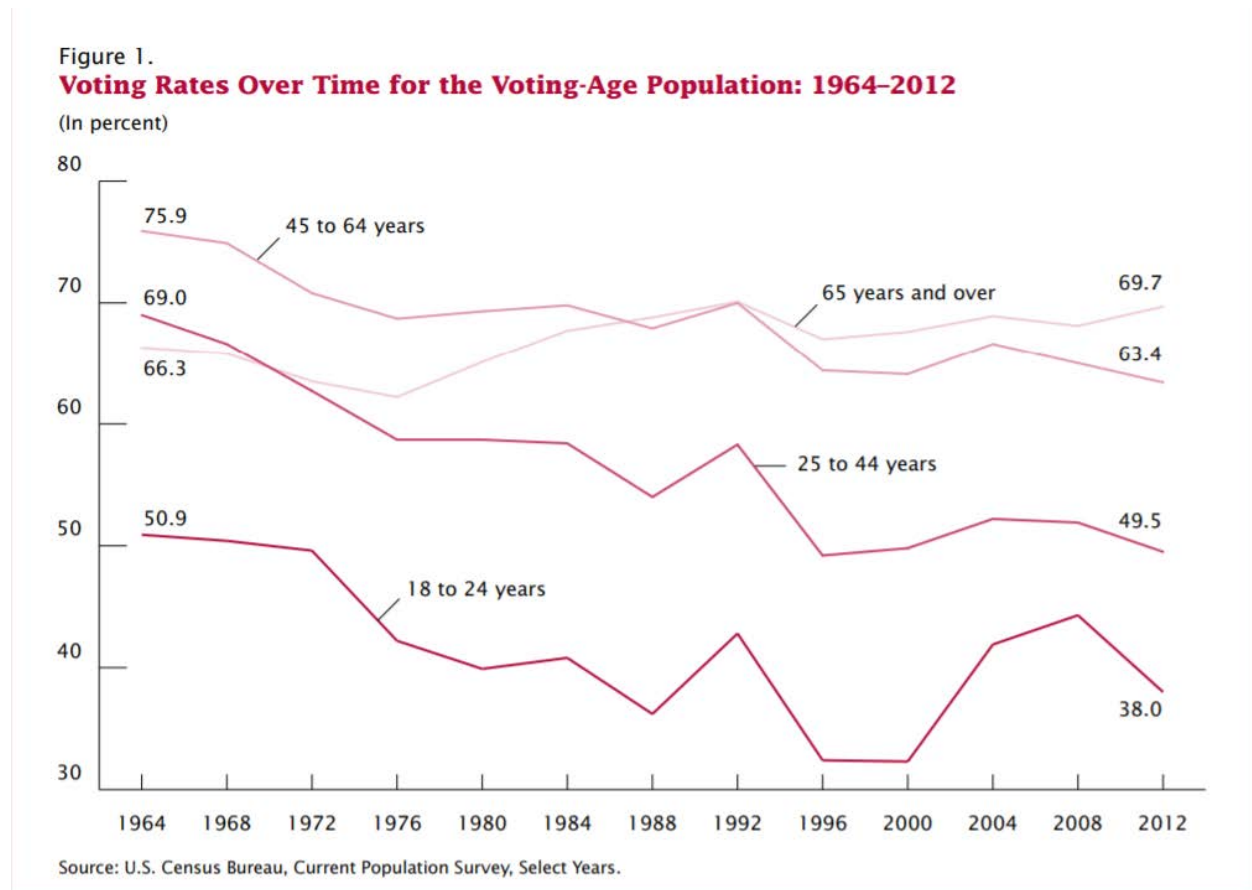
The second policy focuses on increasing voter registration and voter turnout through collaboration with and changing the structure of the Borough of State College. By shortening term lengths of the Borough Council seats, as well as those of members of the town’s various Authorities, Boards, and Commissions, hopefully it will encourage increased civic participation on the part of students. Transitioning to a ward system for the distribution of Council seats would aim to ensure a fair representation of students on the Council. Finally, mandating the real estate companies that control the apartment market in State College to aid in publicizing voter registration efforts and voter day awareness would also help reach the goals of a civically passionate and engaged State College.

The third policy is directly associated to the previous two policies and regards the implementation of effective communication methods to inform the Penn State student body about the first two policies. Through the use of creative social media campaigns, a multimedia production, and both conventional and unconventional news outlets, the messages about establishing structures to increase voter turnout and reforming borough parameters to increase student voices can be disseminated to a large audience.

## **POLICY ONE**

## 1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to implement structural change in the way that Penn State encourages students to both register to vote and vote. There are three motivations for this policy. First, studies show that college-age students have the lowest voting turnout (see Figure 1).



Because voting is one of the most important civic duties of citizens (File), the lack of participation by a set demographic damages American democracy. Based on recent voting trends and the historical precedents outlined in graph A, America has set a path toward gerontocracy. Therefore, the first motive is to improve the state of American democracy by improving participation by minority demographics (specifically college aged voters). Furthermore, research shows that people who vote at a young age tend to become habitual voters (Fergus). As Eric Plutzer, a professor of political science at Penn State puts it, “get them to the polls once, and they will likely vote again and again” (Fergus).

The second motivation derives from the fact that effective decisions require participation by those who are impacted by those decisions, and the university can teach that lesson on campus. Because college-aged students are often highly impacted by legislative decision (see Powell’s “5 Ways the New Tax Law Affects Paying for College”), the most effective decision would be made when they are involved in the decision-making process. However, college-aged students are largely not involved in the process of voting and therefore do not exercise their say in the process. The university, as an educational institution first and foremost, should put resources toward teaching this lesson to its students so that they may become civically engaged citizens. In fact, a study by Ulbig and Waggener even demonstrated that students are more likely to vote when they register through on-campus efforts than through other efforts. In effect, the university is the most equipped and well-suited to create better citizens—a key focus on this university.

Finally, the purpose of this policy is to propose changes to create an environment of voting and registering. According to an article published by Glenn, Huge, and Lunney the creation of voting as a social norm and expectation within college-age student has an immense impact on not only increasing voting registration but also increasing turnout on election day. If Penn State is able to create a culture of voting and registering to vote then future efforts to get students to vote would not be as burdensome: the effect of the culture would do the work itself.

## **1.2 HISTORY, EXISTING POLICY, AND PROBLEMS**

Penn State has attempted to increase voter turnout multiple times. To look at past methods of increasing voter turnout at Penn State, an analysis of news published by Penn State was conducted with specific focus on the keywords “voting” and “vote.” There are two common trends in the past methods of attempting to increase voter turnout. The first method simply instructed and encouraged members of the Penn State community to vote. However, these articles often fail to relate to students and simply instruct about the logistics of voting. The most recent article urges students “to be engaged citizens” and vote without stating specific reasons why (“University community encouraged to vote on Nov. 7”). Although brevity is important, this does not serve as an effective way to communicate why students should register or making it easy to register.

The second method is through student organizations, mostly student government. The University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) hosts PSU Votes week in an effort to get people to register to vote, even offering Creamery certificates to those that register (“Students receive a sweet reward when they register to vote this week”). However, participation in this event seems to be restricted to those involved in student government.

There are many problems with the way students have been previously encouraged to vote. First, news and email messages from the University are unmotivating and carry a tone of begrudgement, as if they were required to remind to students to vote. This does not create an environment where registering to vote is the norm of the campus but makes registering to vote out to be a chore that must be undertaken by the populace.

Further, involvement in getting people to registering to vote is limited to student government. Although most students are involved in organizations, most are not involved or engaged with the student government as evidenced by the fact that only around 6,000 students out of the 46,000 at



University Park elected to vote in the student government election this year (or about 13%) (Starr). This was down from the 30% of the student body that voted in last year's elections (Ciapetta). Clearly, students do not show an affinity for engaging with student government and therefore leaving the task to register voters to them alone would be ineffective.

The policies propose attempt to remedy these problems. First, they involve rigorous and constant attempts to get people to register to vote. They also engage students from a wide variety of university activities to join with the culture of registering to vote. The policies not only take common practices that were effective at other universities, but they also look at the unique way in which Penn State is situated to dramatically increase its voter turnout due the nature and culture of Penn State's campus.

### **1.3 POLICY PROPOSAL AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Universities all over the country are working towards an increase in voter turnout by their students and have implemented University wide policies to make registration and voting more appealing. One such university is the University of Missouri, St. Louis. This University had a 64.7% student voting rate for the 2016 election due to the fact that they have a civic engagement coalition present on their campus (Novey). Their civic engagement coalition develops campus-wide plans to encourage student voter participation as well as hosting annual voter registration drives to make sure that a multitude of students are eligible to vote. This coalition is also in effect throughout every semester and meets monthly, not just during voting seasons. They hold events throughout the year where students can interact with elected officials.

Young adults do not have a sense that their vote will make an impact, which has led to less than half of eligible young adult voters actually voting for national presidential elections, as seen in the United States Census Bureau's voting data (Brennan). Since this is such an issue that is present throughout schools all over the country, Universities and Colleges have been working towards figuring out strategies that encourage students to vote. Some of these strategies include implementation of incentives and educational programs to motivate students to vote. Less than 19.9 percent of the youth population (people between the ages of 18 and 29) voted in the 2014 presidential election, from the 45 percent in the 2012 presidential elections, so similarly to Penn State, fewer youth are participating in elections (Solomont).

The three main issues pertaining to why students do not vote are that they are first time voters when they come to college, they don't have enough exposure to political current events, and do not contain an understanding about the basic principles of how, when, and where to vote. Universities such as Livingstone in North Carolina, have thrown a big voting party with food, prizes, and with an inviting atmosphere. The University of Livingstone voting party also included candidate presentations, which resulted in the registration of 400 students. Tufts University has partnered with corporate partner, TurboVote, a nonpartisan nonprofit to encourage students' literacy in voting as well as sending out alerts concerning voting deadlines and making it easier to vote online. Tufts also has worked with a multitude of on campus organizations for voter registration drives, rides to polls, open forums, and outreach activities. The University of Houston-Downtown organized a "Walk 2 Vote" initiative to get students talking about and thinking about voting in the 2012 and 2014 elections (Solomont).

At Penn State, a coalition could work throughout the year to determine incentives that would most effectively encourage students to register to vote within the Penn State community. One idea would be to fast track ticket lines for those who have registered to vote. Similar to fast passes in Disney

world and other theme parks, the students who are registered to vote will be able to go in a quicker line to get better seats at Penn State Football games or events hosted by Penn State, such as concerts and comedy routines. This strategy could also be applied to events such as the THON. Before THON organizations have to wait outside to get a good spot in the stands, so by using voter registration as an incentive where the organization with the most people registered to vote are then able to obtain better spots in the line to walk in and therefore increase the amount of student voters on campus. Another way to get students to register to vote could be the inclusion of a political speaker series at Penn State. This could provide students and faculty with exposure to all political parties allow Penn State to see and hear from candidates, which could increase the students at Penn State's understanding of their civic duties well as their worth as an American. At Northwestern, their political science department holds workshops that bring together faculty, graduate students and specialty guest speakers to discuss different aspects of the political realm (Department). If Penn State could hold workshops or hold a speaker series similar to the distinguished speaker series going on in the HUB this semester more students on campus would have the opportunity to learn more about politics and why it is so important that they participate in the election process. The coalition could also use any or all of the strategies previously mentioned. There are a multitude of ways to increase voting efficacy and voter turnout. A combination of a variety of methods will attract different students and a variety of demographics, which will allow Penn State can reach the maximum number of students.

Those students who are unable to vote, such as international students and illegal immigrants will not be able to reap the benefits of incentives but will continue to get the equal opportunities for all University held events. These incentives will not be hindering their experiences here but will unfortunately not allow them to obtain extra benefits. They will however still be able to participate in

any university held event such as a voter walk, block party on the hub lawn, or listen to a political speaker.

Due to the new policies being put into place at Penn State, another way to keep the Greek community accountable as well as encourage an increase in their civic duties, Penn State could allow Greek organizations to obtain points towards their recognition on campus. Panhellenic holds activities for increasing student engagement on campus, which encourage all of the women that are a part of Panhellenic to be aware of activities on campus. Events such as getting stickers for mental health awareness month, education about sexual assault, and listening to a speaker discussing eating disorders are used to raise awareness of the struggles of women and all people throughout the Panhellenic community. Each Panhellenic chapter has to have a certain percent of their membership participate in these events, such as 70% attendance or the chapter will be fined. If there were events proposed by a Penn State Voting coalition that could be sponsored and approved by the office of fraternity and sorority life then another section of the student body could be obtaining knowledge concerning voter efficacy and the importance of each individual vote. The events planned on campus for all students could also count towards the fraternity and sororities standards of excellence participation (About).

At University Park alone, Penn State has a reported 40,835 undergraduates enrolled for the 2017 – 2018 year. As stated in a Boston Globe article, only about 48% of college aged students vote, which means that at University Park there are around 20,000 untapped voters (Eppolito). Although that is a very miniscule percentage of voters nationwide, that number could have huge implications in the future for both local, state, and nationwide elections and consequent policy reform.

According to the Penn State club sports website, there are over 76 club sport organizations involving over 5,800 students. To put that number in perspective, Greek life at Penn State involves a similar number of students. Many of Penn State's club programs are extremely competitive and

members often travel across the nation to compete. As a result, there are numerous costs that participants and team members must pay. Currently, different club sport organizations receive varying degrees of funding depending on the number of community-service hours performed by said club. This symbiotic relationship between the University and club sport organizations has historically been very successful.

The system has three classifications of funding set in place that can be awarded by reaching certain benchmarks of service hours. Events include but are not limited to: attending THON, holding charity events, assisting with Beaver Stadium cleanups, as well as many other volunteer opportunities. The funding that clubs receive is crucial to the success and longevity of the club as it alleviates the dues that members are required to pay. For example, the Men's Club volleyball team was awarded \$7,150. Their dues for the fall were \$325 and \$140 in the spring. Had they not been awarded any funds, their dues would have increased by 59 percent from a total of \$465 to \$740 (Jones).

Similarly, the proposed policy would involve the University adding a separate benchmark: voter registration. This would be a very simple way for the University to invest in the program while also promoting voter participation. In addition to hours, the clubs would report voter registration percentages. To ensure the fairness between different club sizes and funding amounts, there would be multiple categories of clubs depending on the number of active members. Essentially different clubs would be awarded different amounts of funds not only based on the percentage of members registered to vote, but also the size of the club. Each year, the club's funding would be reevaluated as the club gained or lost members to compel clubs to maintain a high voter registration percentage.

Not only would this policy increase voter participation within Club Sports, but it would also set a precedent for other organizations on campus. Although not all organizations at Penn State receive funding from the university, they could offer their members rewards or benefits for increasing the

organizations voter registration percentages. Tying back to the overall purpose of policy one, this would be a large step in the right direction for creating a culture of voting at Penn State.

## **1.4 CONCLUSION**

The current methods used by Penn State to get students to register to vote are ineffective. Rather than continue to rely on press release and one-time events close to the registration deadline, Penn State should focus on creating year-long efforts to get students to register to vote in order to cultivate a culture of voting. The proposed coalition would be able to spearhead the continuous efforts and get people to register to vote in both election and non-election years. Many of the proposed perks to being registered to vote, such as a “fast-tracked” football tickets line, would be effective and persuasive enough for student to register and then hopefully vote.

This policy attempts to create several methods that would increase voter participation within State College. The second aspect of the policy is targeting club sports in order to gain registered voters there. While mainly focusing on certain groups of students, this method would combine with our other method to make an effort to change the voting culture within the Pennsylvania State University for a better, more sustainable one.

## **POLICY TWO**

## **2.1 PURPOSE**

In order to effectively increase the civic participation and impact of students here in State College, there also needs to be improvement at the local legislative level. The policies proposed in this section will focus on making voting and political involvement easier and more accessible for the considerable student population that resides in the State College borough. The focus of this portion of the paper will lie more in changing the structures in municipal law and practice that are prohibitive to student civic engagement; the following will identify these specific laws and practices, how they have impeded student civic engagement, the propositions to amend or resolve these issues. The goal of these changes would be in line with the larger goals of this policy paper, that is, to increase student and overall civic engagement in the State College area through increasing voter registration, turnout, and political participation.

The policies that are being proposed are: shortening the terms of Borough Council members and the terms of those who sit on Authorities, Boards, and Commissions (ABCs), implementing a ward system to be implemented in the State College borough, and instituting a requirement for apartments to participate in making their residents aware of voter registration and voting opportunities. The following will discuss the idea of each policy, how to implement each one, and what the anticipated short-term and long-term effects are.

## **2.2 HISTORY, EXISTING POLICY, AND PROBLEMS**

This section will discuss the history and current state of each of the policies proposed to be implemented, and it will highlight specifically why the status quo is problematic to the goals of the paper. The following will begin with shortening the length of terms for seats on the State College



Borough Council, as well as any of its many Authorities, Boards, and Commissions. As it stands right now, under the Home Rule Charter, Council members serve four year, overlapping terms (State College). It is proposed that the length of the term be shortened to two years, in order to make running for election to the Borough Council more feasible for interested students.

This past year, during the 2017 municipal election, a student candidate ran for election to the State College Borough Council. While unsuccessful, having a student run for a position that has traditionally been held by much older, more permanent members of the community raised interesting questions as to the feasibility of such an endeavor, and whether or not a student could be qualified to sit in these positions. There currently exists, through the University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA), a non-voting Student Representative to Council. This individual, appointed by the student body president and confirmed by Borough Council, serves a term of one year, and are granted speaking privileges during discussion of agenda items, as well as the responsibility for voicing the concerns of the undergraduate student body to the Borough Council. Ultimately, however, the Borough Council can and often does ignore the position taken by the Student Representative on behalf of the student body, and without a vote on the matter, that individual has very little tangible impact on the outcome of matters in Borough Council.

The obvious solution would be to have a student sit on Council and a council member, for which they would have full speaking and voting rights on issues that affect the entire community, students included. The problem with this “obvious solution” is that there a multitude of barriers to this ever happening, as well as some admittedly valid criticisms of the idea itself. For one, 65% of first-time students at Penn State graduate within four years, and the number rises to 86% after six years (College Factual, 2018), and if President Barron has anything to say about it that first number will continue to rise. The point being made here is that undergraduate students at Penn State typically do not stick

around a particularly long time and serving well for four years in a fairly intensive position is not feasible for the vast majority of students.

Less “glamorous” than the Borough Council but every bit as important, the Borough employs a multitude of the previously mentioned Authorities, Boards, and Commissions to advise and assist Borough Staff with their many initiatives. Applications to join these are available to the public and students are often encouraged to apply, and the current Student Representative to the Borough Council is required to sit on one, the Fraternity Focus Group (FFG). Often times, when discussion on a particular topic has reached an impasse in Borough Council due to lack of information or expertise on the topic, the Borough Staff will present to the Council on its understanding of the situation and give them a recommendation as to how to proceed. Since the Staff is limited in size, they often employ these ABCs to provide a wider knowledge base and to gauge the opinions of members of the community on important matters. Sometimes, these ABCs will make recommendations to Council themselves on how to proceed. ABCs vary in the lengths of the terms of its members, but often range from 3-5 years, which just as in the case of the Borough Council seat, we believe is not compatible with encouraging student involvement.

Another existing problem that has been identified has more to do with the voting process than the actual participation in local government. Apartment complexes and the companies that run them are huge, untapped resources for encouraging students to become civically engaged by registering to vote and, on Election Day, actually voting. Voter turnout for Centre County in its November 2017 election was a brutal 24.55 (Centre County PA, 2017). Though this does fall within a frightening national trend (Capps, 2016), having less than a quarter of the population of a city like State College and its surrounding area is alarming, even if there were no major federal elections taking place at the time.

While there is only so much that a borough is legally allowed to do in elections, there are possibilities to explore with the ongoing development of downtown State College.

Large apartment buildings are sprouting up all over State College, and within them live/will live hundreds and thousands of students. With these developments, the State College Borough Council has been strict in its analyzation of each new project that is brought before them. Hours are spent at hearings, with discussions regarding the aesthetics of the building, parking capacity, and the number of beds going into, at times, painful detail. Even with these discussions, there are no apartment complexes that do any kind of promotion or encouragement to vote for those that live in their buildings. This paper will discuss how to get these entities involved in the overall campaign to increase voter registration and turnout.

If one looks back on the history of Penn State, the University came well before the town that became State College. Despite the University employing many local residents, providing them with a multitude of business, and being the reason State College continues to thrive, the University and its students are not well respected or represented by those that govern them. Currently, the local government uses a structure where the elected council members are all at-large members. Meaning, they just represent the citizens as a whole, not a specific constituency. This current structure is not conducive to the students of Penn State, as they rarely have council members that are willing to actually defend them, and the council members are not held accountable for their actions. A different solution that should be explored is the creation of a ward system for electing our council members, rather than an at-large system. This ward system would ensure that students have a better say in the process of self-governance through increased representation.

## 2.3 PROPOSED POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

In order to address the problems detailed in the previous sections, there are several policies that are proposed to be implemented in the Borough of State College. These proposals would all work towards the larger goal of increase civic engagement, with a primary focus on students but a wider goal of raising overall voter registration and voter turnout across all demographics throughout the borough. While these proposals will almost certainly be oversimplifying their respective processes in some way, they are tangible, significant steps forward in accomplishing the goals of this paper. In this section, the strategies for implementation will also be explained.

Shortening the term limit from four to two years would require changing the Home Rule Charter of State College: the very foundational document that essentially empowers the local government. The current language states “All elected officers shall be elected at large, by the qualified voters of the Municipality for four (4) year terms of office, commencing on the first (1st) day of January of the year following the municipal election at which they shall be elected” (State College Home Rule Charter, 1973). To do so, there would have to be a referendum on a ballot, which is no doubt a cumbersome and arduous process to carry out. It would also require that a majority of the population of State College shares our viewpoint and would vote in favor of the change, which would be quite the assumption. In order to follow through and enact this change, there would surely have to be some sort of media campaign in collaboration with any interested and like-minded groups in order to gather support from the student population. This would absolutely be possible, using the message of increasing student voice and utilizing the methods of outreach and communication discussed in Policy Three of this paper.

There would, without a shadow of a doubt, be resistance to this change. Any time one attempts to alter a document that is the foundation of an entire city, there is going to be pushback. The change

itself would also not be popular among the incumbent councilmen and women, or those who hold unfavorable opinions about changing law to allow students greater access to political power. This change would become the epitome of some larger battle between students and more permanent residents, a problem that already sits just below the surface of many issues today. In light of this, actual implementation of this policy would have to come at time when the relationship between students and the larger community, as well as the perception of students by more permanent residents, is much better than it is now. While not horrible, any accurate assessment of the situation would make it clear that now is not the most opportune time for such a drastic change to be pushed for on behalf of students. There are a multitude of smaller steps that can and should be taken, on the part of both students and the permanent residents of State College, to bridge the gap between the two segments of the community. Nevertheless, it is an excellent long-term goal to work towards.

To address the length of terms to ABCs, the fix is much, much simpler than a referendum for the entire community to decide on. These organizations are much less formal than any of the other, more established government entities, and any change would only have to be carried out by the Borough Staff that manages them. This is, consequently, a much more realistic and short-term goal than altering the term lengths of members of Borough Council, as the undergraduate student government already maintains a fairly strong relationship with senior members of Borough Staff. Were the Student Representative to lobby to these members of staff on behalf of the interests of the undergraduate student body, this relatively minor yet effective change would have a chance at being enacted.

In order to utilize the many existing apartment buildings, as well as those that are currently in development, one would have to establish a standard in State College's zoning ordinance that would require all apartment complexes to provide each of its tenants information on how to register to vote, as well as on the nearest polling location for Election Day itself. The benefit of approaching the problem

from this route is that State College is currently revising its zoning ordinance for the first time in fifty-odd years. If there was ever a time for such a change to be proposed, it would be during this lengthy and thorough process, during which the borough is seeking input from a variety of ABCs as well as, later in the process, the wider community.

The actual implementation of such a program would involve increased participation on the part of the apartment complexes and require them to utilize their resources for a cause that does not benefit them. As such, it would be fair to assume that there would be pushback from the owners of the properties during the zoning rewrite process; it would not be ridiculous to imagine that a kind of “lobby-off” would occur, where students would be advocating for this change at all appropriate venues just as these real estate and rental companies would be advocating against it just as much. This scenario would make our third policy of effective communication measures all the more important, as stirring support among the community and especially among students would be critically important.

As mentioned previously, in order to address the issue with the poor representation students face in the Borough, a ward system would be incredibly beneficial for better representation of such a minoritized group. An electoral ward is essentially a division of a city or town that is made for administrative or political purposes. Title Eight “Boroughs and Incorporated Towns,” Chapter Six, Section 601, of Pennsylvania State Legislative Code discusses the “[c]reation and alteration” of wards within a borough. Within this section, there are subsections, with subsection one pertaining to the ability of a borough council to divide the borough into wards. This is where the State College Borough Council has enumerated powers through section 11 of Article IX of the Constitution of Pennsylvania to divide the borough into wards through the use of an ordinance. Further, in section 602, it is stated that 5% of registered electors of the borough may petition council to initiate proceedings under section 601 (the division of the borough into wards) and may present to council a plan showing the boundaries of

the proposed wards of the borough. Council would then determine whether to initiate proceedings under section 601 by a motion approved by majority of the council within 90 days of being presented the petition.

Though the Borough Council has legal jurisdiction to divide the borough into wards, there are certain restrictions that must be followed. First, “no borough may be divided or redivided (*sic*) into more than 13 wards” (*Legislative Data Processing Center*). Second, no ward can be created with less than 300 registered electors (*Legislative Data Processing Center*). In regards to the first main restriction, the proposed policy is to divide the entire State College Borough into seven equally sized wards based on population. Seven is due to the fact that the current council already has seven members, so this would ensure a smoother transition. Second, the 2010 Census reports that the Borough has 42,034 residents (*QuickFacts*). If the Borough were to be divided into seven wards, that would be approximately 6,005 people per ward. If the ward is required to have 300 registered voters, that means approximately 5% of each respective ward needs to be registered in order to meet the legal requirements. Per the numbers from the 2016 presidential election, there were 42,644 registered voters in State College (Turchick). The registration requirement will not be an issue with this level of participation.

About 13,500 students live on campus, and many students that live off campus live in close proximity to other students. Therefore, this would give students a legitimate chance at running and winning in a Borough council election. Further, this gives students legitimate representation on the Borough council. An obvious concern that is often brought up is the question of what would happen in the event of no one running from that specific ward. The proposed policy includes the addition of a clause writing that in the event that no one from a certain ward files a petition to run, the petition period would be extended 30 days for potential candidates from other wards to file their petitions. This clause

is necessary for the continuity of government and preservation of the ward system. In the event that a member of that ward does not run in the given year, this clause still ensures that the ward will have a council member responsible for representing their specific interests. In the event of this situation occurring, the council member would not be eligible for re-election for that ward, unless the same situation occurred, where no one from the ward filed a petition in the regular filing period.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

In its current state, the Borough does not adequately represent a very large portion of its constituency—the students of Penn State. Not only do they fail to represent the students well, but there are also several barriers to entry for students to become their own representatives on the council, or on Authorities, Boards, and Commissions. In order to combat these injustices, the Borough should take appropriate actions to change term limits on the council and ABCs to two years. With that, students would be more inclined to participate in their own self-governance and would be encouraged to give back to their community via public service. Further, the Borough should divide itself into seven wards of approximately 6,005 people each, also giving students a better chance at representing themselves, and having a prominent voice in Borough elections. The ward system is incredibly beneficial for communities with many different stakeholders, and this would be great for making sure the main stakeholders—students—are well represented and understood. Lastly, the Borough must ensure that the members of the State College community are informed on the processes of how and where to vote. By passing a zoning ordinance that requires all apartment complexes to provide each of its tenants information on how to register to vote, and the appropriate polling location for Election Day. If the



Borough were to pass these actual changes, it would be taking steps toward becoming a truly inclusive community that begins to represent all of its constituents.

## **POLICY THREE**

### **3.1 PURPOSE**

In order for any policy regarding an increase in participation to be effectively implemented, people need to be aware of it. It is unreasonable to assume that there will be heightened student interaction with the borough and increased voter turnout if the students don't know (1) the voting process and how to participate, or (2) what the benefits of doing so would be. If there were more easily accessible and user-friendly methods of communication that would attract the attention of the college demographic and inform them of the details surrounding the proposed policy changes to increase their interaction in the borough, then perhaps they would be more likely to participate. Essentially, it is crucial that first and foremost the students are knowledgeable about the proposed policies if they are to be implemented.

The millennial or college-aged generation consumes its news in a far different manner than just a few decades ago. News used to be spread primarily through physical or verbal outlets such as newspapers, newsletters, magazines, flyers, or by word of mouth. With highly developed modern technology easily at disposal, there are a variety of new outlets that can be utilized to spread the word about improving student efficacy in the borough. Many studies have been conducted to determine the differences in the way media is consumed by more recent generations, and the data indicates that millennials receive their information from an increasingly wide variety of sources. A study conducted by the Media Insight Project—which is an initiative of the American Press Institute and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research—found that instead of receiving information from discrete sources, these days “news and information are woven into an often continuous but mindful way that Millennials connect to the world generally, which mixes news with social connection, problem solving, social action, and entertainment” (2015). The same study found that 82% of Millennial survey respondents get most of their news from online sources, 51% of respondents said that they are mostly

or almost always online and connected, 55% said that they have paid to access movie or television subscription services, and that 88% get news from Facebook at least occasionally (2015). The figure on the following page, from the same study conducted by the Media Insight Project, shows other crucial findings with respondents when it comes to the dissemination of news. While 85% say that news is important to them, only 69% of respondents get their news daily. And it seems that many of these respondents who do get news daily get it from social media apps, according to the finding that says 86% of respondents see diverse news options through social media. This study indicates that there is a strong need for better methods of communication, especially because the majority of millennials recognize the importance of getting news. It also indicates that millennials are open to a wide variety of methods in which they receive their news, so it would be beneficial to make use of new and creative communication formats when it comes to informing Penn State students about voting and borough participation.

*(See figure on next page)*

**Figure 3.1**



*(Figure from study conducted by the Media Insight Project entitled “How Millennials Get News: Inside the habits of America’s first digital generation”)*

Though these numbers may seem disconnected or arbitrary, they are very important indicators of the various communications methods that college students access on a daily basis. In order to get the word out about a developing policy, there is a strong need to access these communication methods and send messages in ways that college students will see them. Not only is it necessary for the students to see these advertisements about the benefits of voting and participation in the borough, it is also necessary to make sure that the messages stick with them, and in turn inspire their efficacy.

The purpose of this policy regarding improvement in communication is to utilize the outlets and sources that are readily available on Penn State’s campus in order to create messages that will resonate with students and make them want to act upon their civic duties as members of the State College

community. This policy will cover a wide range of conventional and unconventional methods of communication, and will discuss what current methods are working, and what future methods will.

### **3.2 WHAT WORKS WITH EXISTING COMMUNICATION METHODS**

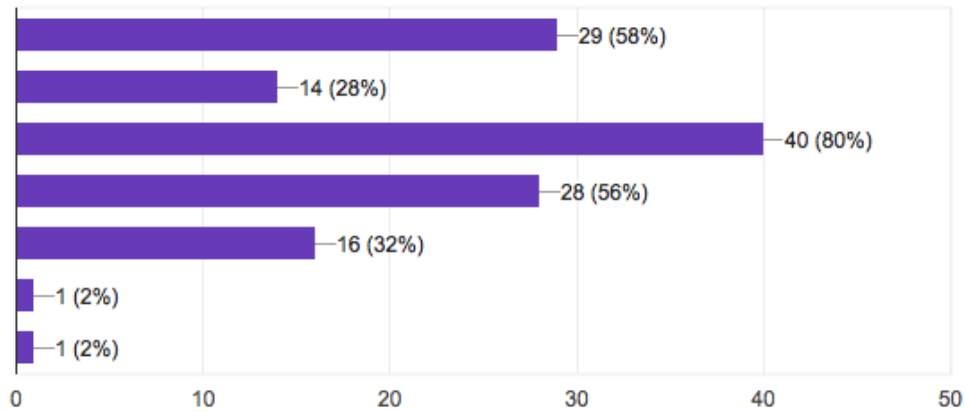
So many different methods of communication are employed on college campuses that it is inevitable some will be more successful than others. However, if many different methods are being used to advertise or advocate for a single thing, it may be difficult to gauge which forms of communication are actually effective. That is why the voices of individual students are so crucial to understanding what works and what doesn't work in terms of the spread of information. To clarify, when the term "information" is used in this policy, it can include anything from lengthy news articles to a brief blurb advertising a club or event. The important thing to discuss here is not *what* type of information students are consuming, but rather *how* they consume it. This will give better insight into the best ways to spread information about the benefits of civic engagement and increasing student efficacy.

A survey conducted by Katie Gergel with Penn State students acting as respondents gathered data that showed what communication outlets were consumed the most, and what aspects of these outlets made them most appealing to the students that chose them. The first question in the survey asked "which of the following do you read at least once a week (select all that apply)?" with the options being PSU news sources (such as The Daily Collegian or Onward State), the daily Penn State email newsletter, Stall Stories/The Toilet Paper, posters on bulletin boards around campus, and flyers found on tables/passed out in the HUB. The results, consisting of responses from 50 students, are as shown:

**Figure 3.2**

**Which of the following do you read at least once a week (select all that apply)?**

50 responses



*(Figure taken from survey conducted by Katie Gergel via Google Poll with 50 anonymous Penn State respondents)*

**Categories (in order from top to bottom): PSU news sources, Penn State email newsletter, Stall Stories/The Toilet Paper, posters on bulletin boards around campus, flyers found on desks/handed out in the HUB or on campus, New York Times/The Skimm (fill in response), None (fill in response)**

Stall Stories/The Toilet Paper was the most popular option, with 80% of respondents saying they read them at least once a week. The second most consumed form of media was PSU news sources like The Daily Collegian or Onward State, garnering 58% of respondents reading at least once a week. A following question in the survey was open-ended, asking respondents to describe the appealing aspects of the communication methods that they engage in on a weekly (or more often) basis. Most responses involved convenience, brevity, and ease of reading—aspects that were likely associated with the short blurbs on the Stall Stories/The Toilet Paper or the quick links that can be accessed through e-

mail or social media. Other respondents addressed the quality of the information, saying that they preferred high-quality reporting, aesthetic pleasure, diverse content, and unique writing style. This information can prove to be very valuable when selecting methods of advertisement regarding student voting and borough participation. It indicates that a variety of news methods are necessary to reach a varied audience, but some crucial aspects to keep in mind are methods that will satisfy a short attention span, and methods that will be informative and pleasing to the eye. Ideas that encompass these characteristics will be discussed in the following sections.

Two more questions on the survey asked participants to complete open-ended responses regarding alternative methods of communication that would either capture attention or generally be effective in spreading a message. The first question asked “has there ever been a method of communication on campus that really caught your attention? If so, please briefly describe it.” The second question asked “What other suggestions do you have, if any, for spreading the word about something on campus?” Due to the fact that these questions were broader and allowed for more creativity with the answer, responses were varied. However, there were some similarities among the opinions of participants. For instance, large events with incentives captured the attention of many. Some mentioned promotional events in the HUB, some mentioned the balloons that are put up around campus for certain affairs, and others mentioned the draw of free food. Others mentioned enthusiastic displays as attention-grabbing, like protests or HUB flash mobs. Other responses continued to address visual pleasure, saying that certain posters, CATA bus ads, or promotional t-shirts caught their eye and made a message stick.

The question about further suggestions for spreading the word about something on campus garnered some insightful comments. Many students emphasized persistence and continuing to spread the message over a long period of time. Others made note of the importance of standing out among the



thousands of other messages that Penn State students are inundated with each day through the use of visuals, special messages, unique titles, and strong language. All of these characteristics are important to consider when planning a public relations campaign to inform Penn State students of the previously stated policies. It is crucial to gain student insight when establishing something that needs to access them directly. It is particularly crucial to use Penn State students as the source of this student insight, because often what works on one campus may not work on another. With this statement comes the next section, examining other communication methods as references and analyzing whether or not these methods would be effective at Penn State.

### **3.3 OTHER ENTITIES AS REFERENCES**

An article entitled “The Internet and Youth Political Participation” describes consumers’ interaction with various forms of media as a “participatory culture” in which youth increasingly use the internet, social media networks, streaming sites, and more (Berry, Gant, Kann, Zager). This article was published in 2007, nearly eleven years ago when these online methods were still in their early stages but certainly on the rise in usage and popularity. However, the internet didn’t need the uber-popularity that it currently has in 2018 for the authors of this article to realize the potential benefits this “participatory culture” can have when it comes to increasing the political efficacy of youths. The authors outline four possibilities for how these new methods of online communication can potentially increase youth involvement in public life.

First, they say that “online participatory culture promotes values that are conducive to democracy. A fundamental democratic value is citizen involvement, the basis for the consent of the governed, the exercise of popular sovereignty, and vigilance against tyranny” (Berry, Gant, Kann,

Zager). Second, they point out that the participatory culture “teaches citizen skills...[and] exposes young people to political information and ideas” (Berry, Gant, Kann, Zager). Third, it calls for political mobilization and influences people to come together for political action. Finally, because the culture tends to favor liberal politics, it promotes values of free expression and public integrity (Berry, Gant, Kann, Zager). These four possibilities are all extremely significant when it comes to promoting efficacy of youth and can be utilized to help implement a policy of increased student efficacy on Penn State’s campus. Any new method of communication implemented to expose students to this new policy should embrace at least some of these values outlined—like exposure to information, mobilization, emphasis on free speech and expression of ideas, etc.—and this article also shows that the “participatory culture” of online outlets especially strikes a chord with youth. This shows that new and improved methods of communication should embrace the internet, social media outlets, and streaming services.

Another reference entity, in the form of a journal article with evidence from eight field experiments entitled “Volunteer Phone Calls Can Increase Turnout,” makes the argument that “brief, nonpartisan phone calls can raise voter turnout if they are sufficiently personal” (Nickerson 271). This study examined hypotheses regarding what type of treatment via phone call would better influence individuals to vote. Through a series of eight voter turnout experiments targeting voters across six different cities in 2000 and 2001, researcher David W. Nickerson found that when the volunteer phone callers were “chatty and informal” with the goal of making a personal connection with the voter, the treatment group was higher than the control group in every one of the eight different experiments. Nickerson concluded that “nonpartisan voter phone banks can increase voter turnout” (273). The following table, taken from page 282 of Nickerson’s article shows the results across the eight experiments spanning six cities. As stated, the voter turnout was greater for each of the treatment groups.

### Figure 3.3

**Table 2**  
**Results for Volunteer Phone Voter Mobilization Field Experiments**

	Albany	Stonybrook	Eugene	Eugene	Boulder	Boulder	Pooled	Boston	Seattle	Pooled	Pooled
Year	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2001	2001	2001	Both
<i>n</i>	1,122	959	1,202	1,960	1,094	2,318		7,055	32,271		
% assigned treatment	71.7	70.9	58.7	48.6	59.7	49.3		17.1	24.6		
% control turnout	74.2	70.6	61.2	55.0	62.6	28.0		54.5	64.7		
% treatment turnout	78.0	78.8	61.7	57.6	64.9	28.2		56.1	64.7		
Intent-to-treat effect <sup>a</sup>	3.8 (2.9)	8.2 (3.1)	0.5 (2.9)	2.6 (2.2)	2.3 (3.0)	0.2 (1.9)	2.3 (1.0)	1.6 (1.6)	0.0 (0.6)	0.2 (0.5)	0.6 (0.5)
% contact rate	61.6	88.7	74.3	49.0	72.1	34.5		55.4	9.6		
Estimated effect on the treated <sup>a</sup>	6.1 (4.7)	9.3 (3.7)	0.7 (3.8)	5.3 (4.6)	3.3 (4.1)	0.5 (5.4)	4.5 (1.7)	2.9 (2.8)	0.1 (5.5)	2.3 (2.5)	3.8 (1.4)
<i>p</i> value	.10	.01	.43	.12	.22	.46	< .01	.16	.50	.18	.004

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent standard errors; pooled values are precision-weighted averages; *p* values calculated are single-tailed.  
a. Percentage point estimates.

*(Figure taken from Nickerson study “Volunteer Phone Calls Can Increase Turnout”)*

Although this study was, again, slightly outdated having taken place primarily in 2000 and 2001, crucial information can be gained in the form of communication techniques that tend to improve voter participation. College students may not respond as positively as the participants in this study when it comes to phone calls from party members, but certain key values were found in this study that should be included in the communication methods used by Penn State as a part of the public relations campaign to get students to vote. Two of these key values were brevity and personalization. Similar to some of the Penn State student open-ended responses from the previously examined survey, it is stressed that the length of the message should not be too long or drawn out. If an individual is not initially interested in a topic, an ineffective way to draw his or her attention would be to release a long message full of details. A short message can capture a short attention span and spark an initial interest, and then longer messages with more information can be employed as a second step. Personalization is also an effective way of enticing individuals. It is easy to ignore a message that appears to be advertised

to the general populace, because individuals may believe that the lack of their voice or vote may go unnoticed in a large group. However, if messages are directed at certain people or certain smaller groups in a more personalized manner, this could more effectively capture attention and keep it for a longer time.

A different study examines the social aspect of voting and analyzes whether “social endorsement cues” can influence voting rates. In the study entitled “Social Endorsement Cues and Political Participation,” authors Robert M. Bond, Jaime E. Settle, Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, and James H. Fowler describe the term “social endorsement cues” as particular attitudes or actions that can influence the decisions of others, because people believe that the support of others is directly linked to their personal relevance (2016). The researchers sought to discover whether the pressures of socialization would increase voter participation, emphasizing the fact that social media has made it so that the actions of each person are readily and easily displayed to others. The researchers made sure to consider how Facebook influenced the perception of social norms, and how devices such as the “I Voted” button could influence participation because of the frequent posting of such devices on social media (2016). They hypothesized before conducting their study that “social endorsement cues are effective at increasing participation, as the information is highly relevant to an immediate decision” (Bond, Fariss, Fowler, Jones, Settle 2016).

The researchers conducted the study using 61,279,316 American adult participants who accessed Facebook.com on Nov. 2nd, the day of the U.S. Congressional elections. These participants were assigned to either the social message group, informational message group, or control group. Those in the social message group were shown messages encouraging them to vote, a link to voting poll locations, and clickable buttons showing them other Facebook users who had reported voting—including six randomly selected profile pictures. Those in the informational group were shown all of

the same information, but no randomly selected profile pictures. Those in the control group did not receive any message. The three variables examined were whether participants clicked the “I Voted” button presented to them, clicked the polling information link, or validated their voting turnout (Bond, Fariss, Fowler, Jones, Settle 2016). When the study was completed, results showed that those participants who were in the social message group were 2.09% more likely to self-report voting, 0.26% more likely to seek information about polling place, and 0.39% more likely to vote overall than those participants who were in the informational message group. Overall, “online political mobilization can affect voter behavior in the aggregate” (Bond, Fariss, Fowler, Jones, Settle 2016). The researchers also examined a number of specific factors within this resulting data, including whether age, gender, or amount of Facebook friends influenced the participants’ actions, but the main take-away for the sake of these proposed policies at Penn State is that online socialization certainly has an influence on political participation. This shows that, while social media campaigns on their own would be an effective communication strategy, an even more effective strategy would be to take advantage of social pressure and create an atmosphere in which it is seen as the popular thing to do to vote and participate in the borough.

### **3.4 PROPOSED METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Based on the data that was gathered from student responses to the survey regarding communication methods on campus and the data found in the previously stated studies on how millennial-aged students get their news, one effective method for spreading the word about increased political participation on the Penn State campus would be to utilize social media. In this day and age, nearly all college students actively engage in various forms of social media, from Facebook to Twitter

to YouTube to Snapchat and many other platforms. Many students replied to the survey saying that if they were to spread a message on campus, they would use social media. The study conducted by the Media Insight Project reports that 86% of millennial participants in the study saw diverse news options via social media. It is quite apparent that spreading a message about voter turnout and increased participation in the borough through social media would access a lot of students, but what is more important is making sure that the students actually interact with the message and that it remains in their mind for a long time after they log out of their social media. There are a variety of ways that social media can be creatively used that would appeal to college-aged students, and Penn State students in particular.

The elements of competition and reward could be very effective, especially with college students. The collegiate atmosphere is inherently competitive, with students constantly comparing themselves to one another in terms of majors, school work, extracurriculars, internships, and more. This competitive atmosphere could be used to this policy's advantage, and social media provides a robust outlet through which to invoke minor "competitions" in order to encourage Penn State students to vote and become more involved in the State College borough. The following are three possible ideas for social media campaigns/competitions, but Penn State should not be limited to only these. One of the most beneficial aspects of social media is the fact that it can be used in a multitude of creative ways.

- 1. Snapchat Filter/Effect**—Snapchat is currently one of the most widely-used social media platforms, with simple ways to spread awareness about a concept or brand. One of these ways is the creation of a geofilter, which allows Snapchat users to put a frame or icon on their photos that advertises a particular product or event. The cost of these filters begins at \$5, and anyone within an approximately 20,000 square foot area would have access to them. According to an article from Entrepreneur.com, "If you target the right locations, your geofilter will interact with

highly qualified potential customers - and everyone they know on Snapchat” (Caramenico). This means that the cheap and simple creation of a Penn State Snapchat geofilter with a message to the tune of “I voted!” or “\_\_\_\_ voted!” would garner a lot of student impressions. The “Penn State Campus Story” on Snapchat could also be utilized, selecting certain student Snapchats with the voting filter to be featured in a campus-wide story. This would introduce somewhat of a competitive aspect, with students striving to be the one chosen as a feature.

2. **Accessing Athletes, Administration, Alumni**—Being the large school that it is, Penn State certainly has some prominent figures on campus that nearly every student knows about and regards as esteemed in one way or another. These could be athletes, administration, or distinguished alumni. If these individuals were to promote voting or student participation via their social media profiles or online presence, this could serve as another effective technique in galvanizing the actions of students. For example, if popular former Penn State running back Saquon Barkley were to release a statement via Twitter or Instagram saying that he would follow 10 students who tweet or post a photo on Instagram saying that they had voted, this would be a driving force for many students to get to the polls. This example could also go for other prominent individuals, such as the promise to take a photo with President Barron, or a personal message from a distinguished alumnus. Social media has made these individuals much more accessible to students, and this should be utilized.
3. **Incentives**—One of the most crucial aspects of a competition is the reward. People are less likely to participate in a contest if they are not offered a worthwhile result. Various competitions can be organized on social media, such as a contest to write on Facebook a story about a time you were involved with the State College borough, or what compelled you to vote. The best of these stories could be selected as the winner of this student participation competition and

consequently offered a reward. These rewards could come in a variety of forms, such as gift cards, merchandise, etc. What would really inspire the students to participate in the competition in the first place would be the possibility of a tangible reward at the end for doing so.

A second communication method that could be effectively employed throughout the year and during the voting season especially would be the creation of a multimedia production. A short video has the ability to both inform and educate students and do so in a timely manner. Watching a video, especially under a circumstance in which students do not have the option to skip the video, would allow students to see both *how to* vote and get involved, and what the benefits of doing so would be. This multimedia production method will be broken into two parts: first, how the video would be formatted and second, how the video would be advertised so that Penn State students would see it.

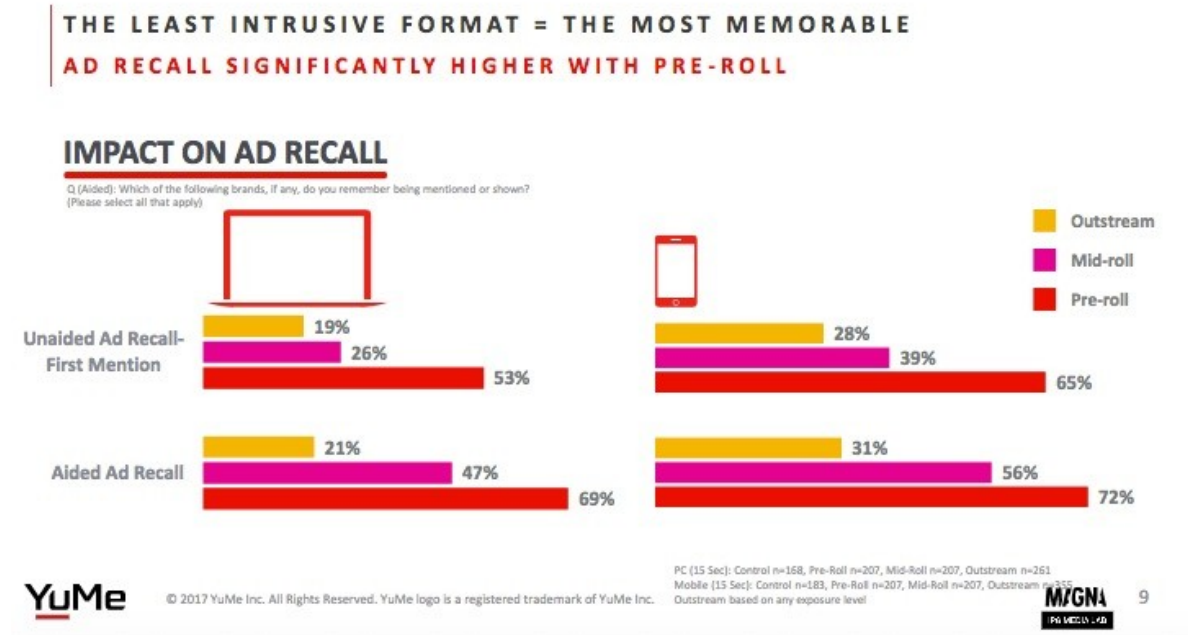
**Format:** One of the best ways to hold a student's attention during any video advertisement would be to create something that they can relate to and something that is personalized. If this video regarding voting and being involved in local government were created on a broad scale not pertaining specifically to Penn State or the student demographic, then it could be easily lost in the stream of advertisements that students view each day. It would certainly be more effective to create a film that could relate to students using the following methods:

- *Student spotlight:* showing short stories about real Penn State students who have participated in the community and have made a real impact.
- *Don Hahn:* mentioning Mayor Don Hahn's accessibility and his office hours in the HUB, so students know about the direct link they have to an important government figure.
- *Relatable issues:* spotlight specific issues that pertain to students at Penn State and acknowledge how their votes/borough involvement could affect the outcome of these issues.



**Employment:** The next step after the creation of the video would be to decide where to show it to access as many students as possible. There are a variety of events around Penn State’s campus that would serve as effective outlets to show this video and capture interest. These events include (but are not limited to): New Student Orientations, HUB Late Night (the video could be a preview to the movies shown in the Freeman Auditorium), events at the Student Engagement Network, State Theatre Events, Convocation, Graduation/award ceremonies, etc. The video could also be posted on various Penn State social media outlets and re-introduced from time to time to keep students engaged. An additional factor to keep in mind is the importance of playing this video *before* any lengthy performance or presentation. A study conducted by the IPG Media Lab and YuMe found that participants were more likely to favor “pre-roll video ad formats” because they were less likely to “disrupt their content consumption” (Fullerton). The study also shows that the pre-roll format made viewers remember the content better than if the ad had occurred mid-stream or after streaming (Fullerton). Though this study was conducted regarding ad placement during video streaming on a mobile phone, the takeaway is that advertisements are more effective when shown *before* the main content. The following figure shows the results from the study, through which it can be seen that ad recall was higher when the ad was shown *before* the featured video.

Figure 3.4



(Figure taken from study conducted by the IPG Media Lab and YuMe)

A final communication method that could potentially benefit both these proposed policies and student publications would be to utilize both the conventional and unconventional Penn State news outlets to spread the word about voting and participating in the borough. Penn State has a multitude of student media outlets that are constantly seeking more publicity and stories to write about, and a majority of Penn State students regularly interact with at least one of these publications. Penn State students are inundated with news every day from a variety of outlets, so it could be effective to make use of a number of these outlets to get the point across that this is an important message to be aware of. Articles about voting/borough participation could be written by The Daily Collegian, Onward State, Penn State Underground, VALLEY Magazine, etc. The articles could be shared on social media, thus giving traction to both the student journalists and the message at hand.

Unconventional methods of spreading news could also be used. In the student-response survey about which news outlets were most popular, a large majority of respondents said that they read The Toilet Paper and/or Stall Stories, which are short publications that can be found on the back of bathroom stalls. Though this may seem like an outlandish or ineffective idea, putting a short ad publicizing the previous policies on these publications could potentially catch students' eyes. Plus, using more survey responses regarding what makes a message stand out, these advertisements could definitely embrace the desired characteristics of brevity, uniqueness, and creative messaging. Additionally, many students responded to the survey saying that they were likely to look at eye-catching posters or flyers in the HUB, on desks, or in various other places around campus. An easy and effective way to spread the message about voting and participation would be to designate certain days throughout the year (and especially leading up to election day) to have a booth in the HUB or participants around campus who are willing to hand out fliers and talk to students about the importance of being involved and what the right steps are in doing so.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

In order for the policies of “establishing structures and methods to increase voter turnout and registration” and “reforming borough parameters to increase student voices” to be implemented, a method regarding communication certainly has to exist. If students were unaware of the process and benefits of taking advantage of these first two policies, then they could not be effective. By looking at what existing communications methods work on Penn State's campus and creating new methods using student input and innovative ideas, the messages regarding voting and borough participation could access a larger number of students. These policies hope to increase Penn State student participation in

local politics, and the first step in doing this is to expose the students to the changing policies that will give them the opportunity to participate.

Previously conducted studies and responses from current Penn State students provide insight into what characteristics and types of communication methods would be most successful. With the knowledge that brevity, uniqueness, and personalization are three aspects that will capture students' attention, the utilization of social media, a multimedia production, and conventional/unconventional news outlets at Penn State could serve as three entertaining, informative, and effective ways of spreading the word about the previous policies.

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