

ON-CAMPUS POLLING PLACE AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

By Cyrus Commissariat, former Andrew Goodman Ambassador, Arizona State University

Updates to the case study by Sterling Bland, from interviews with Andrew Goodman Campus Team members Anusha Natarajan, Jacqueline Sandoval, Jennifer O'Brien, and Andrew Dolan in March 2022

CASE STUDY

Arizona State University (ASU) is the largest university in the country with 135,729 students enrolled. Of that, 54,866 Sun Devils are enrolled at the Tempe campus. ASU is proud to represent the diversity of the state: 30 percent of the overall student body includes first-generation college students; with 46 percent of the incoming class coming from minority backgrounds,¹ ASU will soon be designated a “Hispanic Serving Institution,” a marker of its intentionality in serving diverse communities.²

Students at ASU are fortunate to have many protections in place that make voting on campus as accessible as possible in light of statewide election laws and barriers. This is due in large part to the positive relationship that students and administrators have been able to foster with local and state elections officials. Arizonans in general have several options to choose from when voting. Arizona has established no-excuse early voting which allows residents to vote early, either in person, at the polls which may open up to 27 days before Election Day, or by mail by being placed on a list to receive ballots in the mail. Over 80 percent of Arizonans choose to vote by mail with the other 20 percent voting early in person or on Election Day in person. ASU has worked with local election agencies to ensure that voting in person both early and on Election Day is accessible by providing free parking and coordinating an appropriate on-campus polling location.

This positive relationship with the local elected official responsible for administering elections at ASU began in 2016 with the election of Adrian Fontes to the County Recorder position.

¹ See Arizona State University, Facts & Figures: <https://www.asu.edu/about/facts-and-figures>

² See ASU News, “Hispanic Students Continue to Thrive at ASU”: <https://news.asu.edu/20210325-arizona-impact-asu-remains-committed-hispanic-student-success>

Recorder Fontes has recognized the importance of student voting and has made a point of remaining in contact with university students and administrators when choosing polling locations. Furthermore, under his administration, the county pivoted towards county-wide voting such that if one is a resident of Maricopa County, they are able to vote at any polling location, thus eliminating voter confusion and the need to know one's precinct. This decision has had a positive effect on students' abilities to vote on campus as students from all over the county come into the university daily. Maricopa County is currently the second largest voting jurisdiction in the country.³

That is not to say that elections were error free during this tenure. For example, in 2018 the polling place selected was unable to adequately accommodate the increased voting rate which resulted in long lines throughout Election Day. Recorder Fontes as well as ASU administrators and student leaders recognized the 2018 location was not suitable and therefore searched for appropriate substitutions that could accommodate the number of voters. After lengthy discussions, it was decided that in-person early voting and Election Day voting for the 2020 election cycle — including the presidential preference election (PPE), state primaries, and general election — would be held at the Sun Devil Fitness Complex (SDFC), ASU's main gym, located on the Tempe campus. The location meets all the requirements a polling place must adhere to which center around ADA access as well as proximity to parking.

Arizona's PPE took place on March 17, 2020 and luckily turnout was quite high given the circumstances of COVID-19. The SDFC was used for the first time for this election, and the location was a great success. The location was close to parking and restrooms, was ADA accessible, and the county was able to maintain sanitary requirements. Fortunately, the line was never too long even with social distancing guidelines, and the poll was appropriately staffed with enough poll workers. Arizona's many voting options help to bolster turnout and ensure voters have options when seeking to exercise their right to vote. During the general election on November 3rd, 2020, the same story held true. Students — in the face of a global pandemic — ran to the polls and voted at a rate 7.5 percentage points higher than in 2016's general election, thanks to the innovative efforts of Andrew Goodman Ambassadors encouraging and equipping their peers.⁴

Since the County Recorder left office on January 1st, 2021, ASU's Andrew Goodman Campus Team has persisted in developing relationships with key state administrators to maintain the polling site. Students are working with the new County Recorder, Stephen Richer, and the Secretary of State's office to host events providing information to both in-state and out-of-state Sun Devils interested in civic engagement. Engaged staff at ASU continue to inform and learn from state administrators to sustain their relationship with the Andrew Godman Campus Team.

³ See Maricopa County Election Facts | Voting Equipment and Accuracy: <https://www.maricopa.gov/5539/Voting-Equipment-Facts>

⁴ See ASU News: "ASU Student Voter Participation in 2020 Rises from 2016": <https://news.asu.edu/20211115-asu-student-voter-participation-2020-rises-2016>

As a part of the broader Civic Engagement Coalition’s “all-in plan,” which includes 30+ civically engaged organizations on ASU’s diverse campus, the Andrew Goodman Campus Team is committed to broadening its advocacy by continuing to provide educational materials and polling access to historically marginalized communities, including Native American and AAPI students. As Anusha Natarajan, Andrew Goodman Ambassador and chair of the Civic Engagement Coalition, puts it: “If the call to participate in American democracy comes from someone our age, or who looks like us, people in our generation will listen. They will pay attention, vote, and be engaged on campus.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To find other case studies, visit [Securing On-Campus Polling Places: Case Studies from the Andrew Goodman Network](#). To learn how to bring a polling place to campus, visit [Securing On-Campus Polling Places: A Toolkit](#).