



ON-CAMPUS POLLING PLACE AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Updates by Emma Strother, based on an interview with Evan Malbrough, March 15, 2022

CASE STUDY

Georgia State University (GSU) is one of the largest universities in the state of Georgia with its largest campus located in the middle of downtown Atlanta. The university has six campuses in three different counties and serves 55,000 students in total. GSU's Atlanta campus is a few blocks away from the Georgia State Capitol, Atlanta City Hall, and the Fulton County Government Center.

In 2016, Evan Malbrough was a GSU freshman music major who spent his weekends campaigning for local candidates. He helped found Vote Everywhere GSU – a campus coalition of student voting advocates – to tackle the deep disillusionment he heard from many first-time voters who did not see their values reflected in government in 2016. With support from The Andrew Goodman Foundation, Evan and his peers built one of the most impactful student voter empowerment programs in the country by 2020.

At first, Vote Everywhere GSU focused on voter registration and access to the polls. It was sometimes an uphill battle. Evan would walk from campus to the Georgia State Capitol to personally submit students' paper voter registration forms. Then Stacey Abrams' 2018 gubernatorial race sparked the rise of non-partisan voting rights groups on campus, including the NAACP, Fair Fight, and Black Voters Matter. With voter registration well-supported, Vote Everywhere GSU could take the next step and engage students in voting rights year-round. Evan shared that learning from The Andrew Goodman Foundation was key to this strategic shift. "Having relationships with municipalities goes a long way. AGF teaches you the basics and helps build those relationships."

The team visited Introduction to American Government classes, and convinced professors to give their students extra credit if they either registered to vote, wrote a paper about why they would not vote, or for international students, listed the officials who governed their home. They lobbied the administration to purchase TurboVote, an app for voter registration, absentee ballot requests, and election reminders. They ramped up National Voter Registration Day events, and leveraged The Great Debate – an annual GSU debate between College Democrats and College Republicans – to invite local election officials to campus and win grants for non-partisan voter engagement.

In 2019, Fulton County Commissioner Robb Pitts announced his goal to increase youth civic participation. In July, he agreed to meet with Evan and a small group of GSU students who pitched their idea for a poll worker pipeline on campus and a student-run precinct. At the time, Fulton County used a mobile precinct to travel between public colleges, but it was stretched thin. Evan knew that he “needed to find the most qualified students imaginable, just to get a foot in the door.” Ultimately, the group included the GSU Student President, a Congressional Black Caucus intern, an ACLU intern, a career military medical school student, and an intern in the UK House of Lords.

In “Our Democracy Depends On It: Why Young People Should Consider Becoming Poll Workers”¹ Evan wrote about the need for young poll workers. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission reports that most poll workers who worked in the 2016 general election were between the ages of 53 and 70. The Commission also reports that 65 percent of jurisdictions reported that it was “very difficult” or “somewhat difficult” to find and hire poll workers.² To fill this need, Vote Everywhere GSU pitched to Commissioner Pitts they would create a cohort of students to add to the ranks of poll workers.

By the time Fulton County and the GSU administration approved this plan, GSU’s Atlanta campus had served as an early voting “outreach” polling location for three election cycles. Being an “outreach” location meant that it was not open the entire three weeks of early voting, but rather for two-to-three days as a way to expand access to student voters. GSU’s outreach location was usually busy due to its placement in the center of the city. For the 2016 and 2018 general elections, it was staffed by poll workers trained by the Fulton County Election Office.

In 2019-20, eight GSU students went through the early voting training process to become certified registrars and poll workers. This program was the first of its kind in Georgia, and it took eight months to set up. The State had just signed a contract with Dominion Voting to overhaul its

¹ Malbrough, Evan. “Our Democracy Depends On It: Why Young People Should Consider Becoming Poll Workers - Blavity.” *Blavity News & Politics*, 2019, blavity.com/our-democracy-depends-on-it-why-young-people-should-consider-becoming-poll-workers?category1=politics&subCat=opinion.

² “EAVS Deep Dive: Poll Workers and Polling Places: U.S. Election Assistance Commission.” *EAVS Deep Dive: Poll Workers and Polling Places* | U.S. Election Assistance Commission, www.eac.gov/documents/2017/11/15/eavs-deep-dive-poll-workers-and-polling-places.

election system. It was February 2020 by the time students had access to Dominion voting machine training. They had to miss classes for training and in order to run the precinct.

In March 2020, the students set up the polling location in GSU's ballroom and staffed it for two full days. The location served 420 people who were mostly students. Vote Everywhere GSU also set up a voter information table outside the location to give out-of-county students vital information on how to cast a ballot. The precinct closed on schedule, and just three days later GSU shut down due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Evan reflected, "if it had been scheduled one week later, it would not have happened at all."

After the success of the polling location, Evan published [*The Hitchhiker's Guide to Building a Youth Poll Worker Project*](#) with The Andrew Goodman Foundation and Democracy Works. The comprehensive guide takes student advocates step-by-step through the process of opening and staffing their own polling locations. While this guide was circulating, Evan took his expertise on the road. GSU students were some of the last poll workers to be trained on Dominion machines before the Covid-19 lockdown, and Evan used this knowledge to run precincts across Fulton County after graduation. It was through this experience that the need for youth poll workers really hit home.

At one precinct, ethernet cords malfunctioned minutes before voting started, and Evan was forced to run the entire precinct from a WiFi hotspot on his cellphone. They were so understaffed with so many voters that staff arrived at 5:00 a.m. and did not leave until 2:00 a.m. Evan knew they needed more early voting precincts, staff, and youth leaders, so he launched the Georgia Youth Poll Worker Project. The nonprofit organization started as an Instagram campaign to help recruit and train young poll workers across the state. The project amplified how pollworking can meet young people's economic needs, and "dug its heels into the cultural organizing space," making the case that youth are crucial to the future of democracy.

Now a Fellow with the ACLU of Georgia and a Board Member of The Andrew Goodman Foundation, Evan continues to work at the forefront of youth political and civic empowerment.

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](#).