

ON-CAMPUS POLLING PLACE AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Updates to the story by Sterling Bland, based on an interview with Andrew Goodman Campus Champion Leonard Apcar and Andrew Goodman Ambassador and Geaux Vote President Mia LeJeune in March 2022

CASE STUDY

Louisiana State University (LSU), the flagship school for the state of Louisiana, is situated in the state's capitol of Baton Rouge. LSU boasts approximately 35,000 undergraduate and graduate students, making it the largest student body in the state, of which minorities comprise approximately 30 percent.¹ Prior to 2019, LSU students were treated unequally when it came to their voting rights. A major ongoing cause for concern on campus was the manner in which the voting precinct line was drawn, cutting directly through the middle of the central avenue of campus. LSU students living on one side of Highland Avenue could vote conveniently on campus, while students living on the other side had to travel a mile and a half off campus through an adjacent community. This split student vote caused confusion about who should vote where, and discouraged students who were juggling heavy workloads to venture off campus through unfamiliar terrain, where public transportation does not connect the neighborhoods. Furthermore, the resources available at off-campus polling locations are limited and contribute to long lines and lack of adequate parking space.

The issue came to a head in the highly-watched 2019 gubernatorial race, where Election Day coincided with both LSU Homecoming and a major football Game Day. Student advocates were concerned that traffic onto and off campus would be untenable, and that security concerns would arise even if they organized shuttles to bring students to and from the off-campus voting location. Two additional factors complicated this tension at LSU. First, pursuant to state law, LSU students who vote at the wrong polling place — for example, those who arrive to vote conveniently on campus like their peers, rather than traversing to the off-campus location they are assigned to — will have their votes counted for federal races, but not the local or state

¹ See "LSU Budget and Planning: Enrollment by Race," available at: <https://www.lsu.edu/bqtplan/trend/dashboards/race.php> (last accessed April 3, 2022)

racers.² In other words, provisional ballots are not a safeguard for LSU students who cannot make it to their assigned location off campus. Second, the dividing precinct line splits the student vote across two state legislative districts.

Andrew Goodman Ambassadors at LSU worked with local and state election officials to troubleshoot sustainable solutions in advance of the 2020 presidential race, with a central demand being to secure a centrally located polling place on campus for all LSU students. Fortunately, after years of advocacy, Geaux Vote, which is how LSU's Andrew Goodman Campus Team is locally known, has been successful in securing a consolidated on-campus voting location. They redrew the line of one polling precinct such that it might be consolidated with the one off campus, without displacing neighborhood voters. As a result, all LSU students would be able to vote at one on-campus polling location. Key to this success was a combined advocacy effort using data and storytelling to present the case. Student advocates met one-on-one with city council members, presenting the nonpartisan case for student voting rights. At the same time, the Geaux Vote team took to the streets, tirelessly registering as many voters as possible in hopes to dissuade City Council from their belief that students were politically apathetic. Their efforts have sustained to the present, in which voter registration on campus increased nearly ten percentage points, alongside a 16.7 percent increase in voter turnout from 2016 to 2020.³

Unfortunately, however, because of local law, consolidated voting at a single polling place could not occur until after the latest decennial census — thus, the on-campus voting location continued to remain in place, but only some students could vote there. Next year, a state-wide election will be held and students will all be able to vote on campus for the first time, using their student IDs as legal voting documentation. While celebrating their hard-fought success, LSU student advocates are committed to further study of whether their campus is unconstitutionally gerrymandered. Furthermore, their aim is set on making the most of their new on-campus voting location by increasing voter registration. LSU voter turnout, last measured at 64.7%, is just below the national average across institutions in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, which ranks it Silver. The Geaux Vote team has its eyes set on Gold (70-79% voter turnout), and have created a “Civic Engagement Improvement Plan” — targeted towards engaging students through partnership with the college athletics department and institutionalizing an online registration platform across various school webpages. As the plan establishes, LSU is the flagship university of the state. As such, its campaign for an on-campus polling location and its drive to increase voter registration will emanate far from the university's gates in revitalizing American democracy.

² La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 18:566; see also Louisiana Secretary of State, Vote Provisionally, available at: <http://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/Vote/VoteProvisionally/Pages/default.aspx> (last accessed March 7, 2019).

³ 2020 NSLVE Campus Report. “Student Voting Rates for Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College,” October 2021.



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](#).