

PanthersVote at UNI

Young people are often known for having the lowest voter turnout among American demographics. PanthersVote, founded in 2018 by the Political Science Department, aims to change that by encouraging electoral participation. UNI students already have a strong tradition of voting and civic engagement, and PanthersVote seeks to build on that foundation. By coordinating the various voter registration efforts already happening on campus, creating a unified brand for voting activities, and serving as a catalyst for student involvement, PanthersVote strives to make voting a core part of UNI's culture. We've partnered with a wide range of campus and community stakeholders, including NISG, the President's Office, Maucker Union, Athletics, faculty members, and the Black Hawk County Auditor's office, to achieve this goal. In addition, all students working on PanthersVote have received Koob Fund scholarships, supporting their civic engagement efforts.

New voters face a number of challenges, which often discourage them from voting. The process itself requires quite a bit of knowledge. Voters need to know how to register, how to obtain proper voter ID, and where and when to vote. They also need to feel like they understand the broader political process and issues at stake in the election. And they need to feel that voting is important. PanthersVote works to build skills, knowledge, and values of participation through its programming. Student voter ambassadors help students register through tabling across campus and at events, visits to classes, and outreach to student organizations. The Political Science Department coordinates a series of talks to help students learn about what is at stake in the election.

This year, our series includes talks on foreign policy, election integrity, navigating misinformation, and economic policy. As election day approaches, we provide information sessions on how to find your polling place and making a plan for voting. And on election day, we provide signage to remind students to vote and get them to their polling places. These efforts have been a success. In the 2020 Presidential election, 50% of Americans and 55% of Iowa's aged 18-29 voted. For UNI Students, that number was 73%, one of the highest turnouts for any university in the US.

In the Spring of 2024, Justin Holmes of the Political Science Department offered a class, *Citizen Participation and Civic Engagement*, centered around PanthersVote. Students started by learning best practices for getting out the vote, learned from a variety of guest speakers, and for a final project, developed the Fall 2024 campaign. This gave students the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in engaging with the community. Several students from the class are implementing this programming as Student Voter Ambassadors, and another is interning on election issues with the Auditor's office. We are currently in the midst of the 2024 PanthersVote campaign. If you would like to be a part of it (and we'd love to have you), Contact Justin Holmes (Justin.holmes@uni.edu)