REDISTRICTING AND THE POLITICS OF COLLEGE TOWNS

Project Overview:

This is a complex topic, so in this proposal we will divide the discussion of redistricting and the politics of college town separately, then discuss goals we would like to accomplish before finally outlining plans of action to complete those goals by Spring 2015.

What is the problem?
College towns have the potential to become major political players. In fact, in the 2012 election, President Obama targeted college campuses in swing states because they typically favored the Democratic Party. Unfortunately, the age group 18-24 (college-aged students) has one of the lowest voter registration and turnout while being perhaps some of the most uniformed people when it comes to politics, the issues and current events. College students are not typically engaged in the process.

Why is this significant to LSU?
While Louisiana is not a swing state, it is clear that students on college campuses have strong opinions about current political issues as is obvious from the numerous political organizations on campus. Unfortunately, these opinions often lead to separate groups who do not discuss their differences in ideology. This practice mirrors and reinforces the partisanship in Congress. Without an opportunity to have a “meeting of the minds” or a discussion with an opposing viewpoint, then students, future voters and leaders, become complacent with their opinions and reluctant to change or consider a different ideology. In addition, while many students may be interested in working with the government or getting involved in their hometown’s politics, at LSU there is not an efficient way to do so. For example, there is no information on absentee voting readily available to out-of-town students, there are minimal internships with government officials available and the most spirited debate on campus.

Events/Initiatives:

1. **Voter Registration Drive**— We will hold four big voter registration drives through-out the year (two each semester). These will take place in LSU’s Free Speech Alley. Volunteers will encourage students to register to vote. We will have incentives (such as a chance to win a raffle) to encourage students to register. This will contribute to Goal 1.

2. **Meeting of the Minds**— We will invite several different political parties onto campus to hold a “fair” where students will have the opportunity to find where they fit in. Here we will have students register to vote and hold mock debates between representatives from the different parties. This will contribute to Goal 2.
3. **Eliminate the Cost for Absentee Voters on Campus**— After engaging in discussion with out-of-state students, we discovered that in order for them to vote they needed to have their ballot notarized. The notary cost around $20.00. We will be petitioning student government to cover the cost of the notary, so that students aren’t limited by funds when it comes to political involvement. Being able to vote without worrying about the cost will encourage students who do not live in Louisiana to still be involved in the political process. This will help us encourage political participation (Goal 3).

(Major) Measurable Goals:

1. **Register students and community members to vote** – We will register 1,000 people to vote per semester. We will determine this by having participants fill out a contact form for a raffle.

2. **Facilitate a debate between political candidates** – We will aid the LSU Manship School of Mass Communication with their debate by providing volunteers and setting up a registration booth. We will measure participation by the number of volunteers and by the amount of social media attention we receive.

3. **Facilitate On-Campus Political Participation** – We will invite several political parties to set up booths on campus. We will measure our success by the number of parties that agree to come and by the number of students who sign up for more information about the parties.

How will you collaborate with consortium schools?

We will contact local colleges and attempt to connect with their on-campus groups that support voting rights, education and registration. We will provide them with detailed information about registration and a timeline that will help them begin the process. Our current plan already incorporates these local colleges and universities, but it could also be used to facilitate voter registration drives schools that are further away. If our plan is successful, then we would have a solid system and advertising basis that could be sent to other colleges to implement. Having a written template to follow would allow for colleges to more easily host these drives. LSU, BRCC and Southern would essentially be the “guinea pigs” for a bigger movement.