

Action Plan: National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement
Eagleton Institute of Politics
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Application for Funding

The Eagleton Institute of Politics has submitted a proposal to Rutgers University's Academic Excellence Fund for support of a new program called Politically Engaged and Empowered Rutgers Students (PEERS). If we receive this funding, we will have the resources to hire a full-time coordinator for all of Eagleton's activities related to the goals of the National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement. Receiving this funding will allow us to maximize our student engagement efforts by providing student volunteers with a stable center for their activities and a person to ensure that activities get carried out regardless of students' often hectic schedules. We expect to find out within the next few weeks whether the university will be funding PEERS. Should we receive this grant, the plans outlined here can be expanded and enriched.

Elective Politics

The elective politics plan for 2004 is based on similar strategies employed by Rutgers University students during the fall of 2003. We anticipate these activities will continue to increase voter registration, education and participation.

Registration

The first step in increasing the voting rates of Rutgers students is to make sure that students are registered to vote in advance of New Jersey's registration deadline.

Actions

- Create a Rutgers online location where students can download the forms they need to register to vote
- Register the incoming Class of 2008 during summer orientation programs
- Coordinate with the University's Residence Life staff for distribution and collection of voter registration and absentee ballot forms in September
- Organize a faculty campaign to discuss and distribute voter registration forms in class
- Support the University President's commitment to e-mail the University community in mid-September to encourage voter registration
- Communicate with all Rutgers and non-Rutgers organizations (such as Rock the Vote) that have an interest in increasing voter registration (coalition building). Set goal to register a specific number of people
- Set up a collection system to count, copy, and send in registration and absentee ballot forms
- Create a database that catalogs student registration

Education

After students have registered to vote, the next steps are to increase voter education about the issues and candidates in the 2004 presidential election and to generate student interest and participation in the political process.

Actions

- Update current University voter webpage with information pertaining to the 2004 presidential election
- Build coalitions with student organizations, academic departments, and centers and institutes, and nonprofit groups to organize activities and programs that are educational and promote civic participation.
- Coordinate and host educational events, debates, activities on the 2004 Elections
- Produce a voter information pamphlet for distribution to targeted Rutgers constituencies such as residence halls, student centers, and commuter departments.
- Provide University Residence Life staff with voter information

Get Out the Vote

The final stage of this process is to get out the vote by mobilizing students to go to the polls and by making the process of voting easier.

Actions

- Urge local municipalities and the state Divisions of Elections to move polling booths into student centers
- Publicize deadlines and procedures for applying for absentee ballots.
- Launch a University-wide advertising campaign reminding students to go to the polls or send in their absentee ballot. Utilize campus and local newspapers and media as well as University buildings including residence halls, classrooms, dining halls and student centers
- Encourage University President to e-mail the University community about the importance of voting
- Develop a get out the vote plan with student organizations and assist in its execution (coalition building).

Civic Education

The Eagleton Institute of Politics currently implements a number of civic education programs that will continue in the coming year. One of our major initiatives is *Newark Student Voices*. This is part of the national Student Voices Project, a civic education initiative of the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania. The national project works with high schools in cities throughout the country to help students learn about government and politics through the study of local political campaigns and ongoing policy issues in their cities and states. The project provides each participating class with a new computer connected to the Internet and

access to their own Student Voices Web site, through which they follow local news, link to useful resources, and participate in online discussions. The project is active in almost every high school in Newark, NJ. In 2004, the participating classes will learn about the presidential election during both the spring and fall.

We plan to implement a new program in the spring to meet the goals of the National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement. Eagleton Professor Alan Rosenthal is a leading authority on state legislatures and has recently co-authored the book, *Republic on Trial: The Case for Representative Democracy*, with John Hibbing, Burdett Loomis, and Karl Kurtz. He is also collaborating with NJ educators to create a curriculum for teaching democracy appreciation to school-age young people. He has agreed to train college students to teach one section of this curriculum: a three-part lesson that teaches students about the need for negotiation and compromise in a representative democracy, to students in local schools. We believe that this lesson can be an important step in reducing cynicism about elected officials. Among other lessons, we hope to demonstrate that when elected officials compromise, it is usually because they represent a diverse citizenry with varying interests and not because they are “selling out.”

We will recruit undergraduates who are interested in teaching this curriculum in the schools by consulting with the Eagleton Undergraduate Associates, posting to student list-serves, and making announcements in classes taught by Eagleton faculty. Since it may be difficult to convince schools to give us three class periods, we are planning to approach schools that offer after-school programs and are more in need of activities to occupy the students' time.

To help educate students across the University the college students, we will enlist knowledgeable faculty members on each of Rutgers' three campuses to highlight the impact of government and politics in their areas of interest. This will demonstrate to students that politics play a role in all aspects of our society.

Career Development and Internships

In this area, the Institute will continue carrying out the educational activities that have always been a part of its mission for both undergraduate and graduate students. For undergraduates, Eagleton conducts two career development/educational activities: an Undergraduate Associates Program and the Center for American Women and Politics *NEW Leadership Program*.

In the Undergraduate Associates Program, a select group of 20 to 25 students come to the Institute to study government and politics during their last three semesters at Rutgers through courses and a required internship. In recent years students have been placed in the New Jersey Legislature, the Governor's Office, various departments of state government, public affairs offices of corporations, public interest groups, state associations, political campaigns, and lobbying firms.

The *NEW Leadership Program*, run by Eagleton's Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), is a week-long, residential summer institute during which college students learn about women's leadership and women's political participation from scholars and practitioners. NEW Leadership participants are invited back to CAWP to attend special programs, speakers and workshops throughout the year. Since 1995 the annual summer institute at CAWP has focused on New Jersey, bringing students and practitioners from across the state to discuss national and local policy issues.

The Institute also has two graduate programs with internship requirements and one requiring only seminar attendance. Our newest program, the *Governor's Executive Fellowship Program*, assigns eight graduate students to work with designated officials in state agencies or the Governor's office. Fellows meet monthly at Eagleton to discuss their experiences working in government.

Students who are selected to be Henry J. Raimondo Legislative Fellows begin the program in the fall semester by studying the state legislative process as participants in a special series of workshops and an orientation session in Trenton. In the spring semester, the Fellows serve as interns in the legislature, complementing their academic study with hands-on practical experience in state government.

The Eagleton Fellowship Program provides a select group of Rutgers graduate students from varied disciplines the opportunity to further their understanding of the practice of politics and public affairs and to connect their knowledge to their chosen field of study. As the core of the one-year program, Fellows enroll in the Eagleton Seminar in American Politics, which explores the politics of policymaking. It focuses on how politics--political institutions, political processes, and political practitioners--operate in the policy arena and affect the outcomes of deliberations and decision making. The Eagleton Seminar is taught by practitioners with a wide range of experiences in government and public affairs.

The Eagleton Institute faculty and staff look forward to working with the other members of the campaign to engage college students across the country in the political process. These efforts will be a positive addition to our ongoing work at the Institute in the areas of leadership education and youth civic engagement.