

# Find Your Voice, Use Your Vote

UT holds event to encourages students to register to vote

By: Morgan Gurley

In order to celebrate National Voter Education Week, the University of Tampa was visited by a team from Hillsborough County's Supervisor of Elections on Tuesday, October 3rd. With the upcoming elections just around the corner, the university's Political Science department organized the event with the Supervisor of Elections to encourage students to exercise their right to vote and make their voices heard in the democratic process.

The event, which took place in the Vaughn building in the center of campus, attracted a diverse group of students eager to participate in the democratic process. Volunteers, armed with voter registration forms and information packets, were on hand to assist attendees in navigating the registration process. Students were also provided with valuable information on voting locations close to campus and upcoming elections.

Just last year, the University of Tampa earned its inaugural ALL IN Most Engaged Campus for College Student Voting Award. This achievement has pushed the political science department to continue its dedication to nonpartisan democratic engagement. The University of Tampa's administration played a pivotal role in supporting the initiative. Mary Anderson, a professor in the political science department stated "It's crucial for young people to get involved in the political process. Younger generations are the future of our nation and the faster they register, the quicker things begin to change for the better".

The atmosphere was one of excitement as students from various backgrounds came together to embrace their civic responsibilities. Abbey Rebstock, a freshman considering majoring in political science, also expressed her



Image 1: Arianna Gonzales, a volunteer from the Supervisor of Elections office, stands proudly behind her display of voters registration forms and information packets ready to help.

excitement about the event. "I've never voted before," Rebstock said. "Our generation's voice matters, and I think that registering to vote is the first step in making a difference." Since leaving her hometown in Maryland Rebstock explained "I've been exposed to so many new ways of thinking and a very different political environment. Back home, I never thought my vote would matter, but here, I feel that it can make a difference."

To make the event even more enticing, the registration team was armed with more than just registration forms and voter information packets, but what every college kid dreams for. Cookies and coffee. Although Professor Anderson stressed that the event was aimed at empowering our students to be active participants in democracy, she stated that she was "not above bribery to get students to engage".

"I'm excited to cast my first vote in the upcoming elections. This event has made the whole process easy," said Jack Meushaw, a sophomore studying business at the University.

Meushaw, along with 3 of his friends were not planning on registering to vote today, but after walking to get lunch in the Vaughn Center they happened across free cookies and coffee, after a brief discussion with Professor Anderson, the 4 promptly became registered voters in the state of Florida.

"I honestly thought you had to go to the DMV or something and wait hours to be able to vote," Meushaw stated. "I never thought it was as easy as answering a few questions on my way to get lunch."

Meushaw along with many other students in attendance at the University of Tampa have this same conception of voting. A misinformed conception. Many students expressed their lack of knowledge of elections and the voting process as a whole as the reason they have never voted before. Professor Anderson and her team of volunteers from the Supervisor of Elections staff put these misconceptions to bed. Just across the street from the University's campus is a voting location. The First Baptist Church of Tampa, located across from the university entrance at Plant Park has been a functioning voting location for years which makes voting only a 5-10 minute walk from student housing. "Not only is it close, but it's super easy. I have never waited more than 15 minutes to cast my ballot," explained Anderson.

Although many expressed their apprehension about the voting process, another large concern for students was the lack of knowledge. "I don't think I could name one senator from my state," Rebstock stated. "I don't think any of my friends or even my parents could either. It's honestly kind of sad how little I know about who is supposed to

be representing me,” she explained. Professor Anderson quickly stepped in with a packet of information and the important fact that she was not alone. “Most people, even the ones who vote in every election, have no idea what the politicians they vote for do, or the policies they stand behind. This is why we have events like this.” Professor Anderson explained excitedly.

As the event came to a close, organizers reported a successful turnout, with many students registering to vote. The University of Tampa's voter registration drive serves as a prime example of educational institutions actively promoting civic engagement and encouraging young voters to have a voice in shaping their future. By providing these resources and opportunities, the University of Tampa will no doubt continue to produce well-rounded students who are dedicated to making their voices heard, and with the next election cycle approaching quickly, events like this are more important than ever. It is evident that this event has inspired a new generation of politically engaged students at the University of Tampa, who are eager to make their voices heard in the democratic process.

To learn more about the voting locations, registering, mail-in ballots, early voting, and your politicians visit <https://www.votehillsborough.gov/> . Here you are able to check your own registration status, request a ballot, or find your nearest polling location. Also available on campus is Professor Mary Anderson who is excited and eager to answer any questions students may have about upcoming elections and will help provide any resources you may be looking for to become a knowledgeable voter in the 2024 election.