

Districting issues at local college influence voting, laws

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The idea for the recently proposed Equalize Voter Rights Act came after Warren Wilson College experienced a fiasco that changed the results of a local election, according to **Cathy Kramer, dean at the Service Program Office of Warren Wilson College.**

"We registered everyone to vote, but before this election redistricting had happened, and the county commission districts were drawn so that our students were in two different districts," Kramer said.

Prior to redistricting, the students living on campus traditionally used the mailing room as the campus-wide mailing address to register to vote, instead of their physical dorm room address. Now that the campus was split by two districts, this is a problem.

This error was caught by the board of elections, which required many of the students to cast another ballot as a provisional ballot, according to

Kramer.

"They said we needed to have our students registered by residence halls. So at that point, we gave the board of elections a housing list where everyone lived," Kramer said. "They went back and viewed our early voting ballots and gave those students who voted in the wrong district an opportunity to re-file their ballots."

Before the Warren Wilson provisional ballots were counted, Christina Merrill (R) was winning the election by more than 80 votes. When provisional and absentee ballots were counted, Ellen Frost (D) won by 13 votes.

"They gave all of those who had done early voting provisional ballots because they couldn't update their database fast enough," Kramer said. "Once the provisional votes were counted, it changed the outcome of the election."

Before this election, the Buncombe County Commissioners Office was controlled by Republicans, but after the confusion at Warren Wilson, power shifted to the Democrats 4-3.

With this election cycle passed, Republicans Bill Cook, Norman Sanderson and Ronald Rabin say they want to clarify the residency laws in order to prevent this type of confusion in the future, and in doing so they created the Equalize Voting Rights resolution.

"The logic is that students at a university are temporary residents, and as temporary residents they have very little interest in what goes on in local politics," said **Bill Sabo, a professor of political science at UNC Asheville.**

College students are the only group in America to have the right to vote at a place other than their permanent address. No other class has this luxury, according to the Voter Integrity Project.

"It turns out this is philosophically consistent with the position that immigrants shouldn't be allowed to vote because they're temporary residents, they're really not citizens," Sabo said. "What is interesting about this is it is an attempt at coercion, and it is coercion in the most successful form, be-

cause it's dealing with people's wallets."

The Equalize Voter Rights Act does not break the law that states college students have the right to vote wherever they choose to go to school; however, there is no law that solidifies tax exemptions for parents who claim their college student children as dependents.

"It is an interesting strategy. It makes perfect economic sense and it is defensible. It is defensible because if you are a transient resident, should you really have an influence in local politics? But to a greater extent, everyone is a transient resident, given the highly mobile society in which we live," Sabo said.

This resolution is just part of the overall Senate Bill 666, which makes major changes in all future elections. The plan includes clarification of residential addresses that may be used for voting, repealing same-day voter registration, limiting early voting to 10 days and eliminating satellite early voting sites.

"While I hear that this is an initiative to save money, I be-

lieve it may actually be a bill trying to stifle college students getting to the polls," said **Cassie Nelson, a junior psychology student at UNCA.** "It takes away my free will to choose where I want to vote."

The argument Sen. Cook gave for eliminating days of early voting is, each day of early voting costs the North Carolina government \$98,000.

"I definitely think this will lessen the numbers of student turnouts at colleges," Nelson said.

Traditionally, many college students, low-income residents and minorities are the groups that use early voting the most, according to the Center for American Progress.

"One of the big dangers is taking an ad hoc event like the one at Warren Wilson and using that to make general policy on. It's an attempt to correct one little situation with a major overhaul of policy," Sabo said. "That and the elimination of the tax deduction mean that, even though there are votes for it, the act has a reasonable but not a clear chance of success."

New plan invites student veterans to UNC campuses

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The new strategic plan could improve awareness of student veterans and attract them to UNC schools, according to UNCA students, veterans and staff.

"Having a streamlined program for veterans is really going to foster a type of community among the veterans," said **Kevin Rumley, a UNCA senior and Iraq War veteran.**

The plan, developed by a coalition of school administrators, business leaders and professors, attempts to revamp the UNC system for a new generation of students. The plan offers

solutions to cater education to a changing student body, made up of older students, veterans and transfers from community colleges.

Lothar Dohse, a UNCA math professor and representative for the UNC faculty assembly, said communicating the needs of a school to the legislature represents a major hurdle in the planning process.

"Our (the faculty) big concern is that the leadership is being siphoned off into another group that doesn't know what they're doing," Dohse said.

For veterans, the plan proposes a \$3 million initiative to grant early residency tuition status to veterans who plan to eventually move in-state. Rumley said the

tuition drop could help more veterans afford to attend school in the system, using their G.I. Bill stipend. Additionally, the plan suggests streamlining and building the support network across campuses for veterans, including streamlining admissions processes, creating a new website for student-veterans and starting advising centers at Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune.

After completing rehab from injuries sustained in Iraq in 2004, Rumley decided to enroll at UNCA, where his brother was attending school. The 1944 G.I. Bill, and its many revisions, gives veterans the means to look for work and attend school through set monthly stipends.

Rumley said he used his dividends to attend UNCA.

"My brother was actually going to UNCA," Rumley said. "He was graduating, and I came to visit him and it was a fantastic school."

Rumley said he had to work through the lack of a veteran support system at UNCA by seeking out helpful individuals.

"There wasn't an amazing system in place yet for veterans when I started in the fall of 2007, but I found that a key to me was finding incredibly helpful people that would help me find solutions."

Amanda Deweese, veterans services representative for UNCA admissions and Rum-

ley's caretaker, said she acts as a liaison between the school and the VA.

"My role here is that I help them with G.I. Bill benefits," Deweese said.

Rumley said Deweese helped him set up contacts with the VA.

"She got me in contact with the people I needed to at the VA, who were not reaching out to me, so she took the lead," Rumley said.

Rumley is also a member of UNCA's Veterans' Alliance.

"Their mission is to create sensitivity and awareness among students, faculty and staff about the presence of veterans and the potential for PTSD," Rumley said.