

N.C. colleges attempt to increase student vote

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Elon College senior Emily Reardon of Matthews did something unexpected toward the end of her fall break last week. She voted.

"This is my first presidential election and I wasn't about to miss it," said Reardon, 21, who voted mostly Republican in the N.C. early voting system.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, college students are as likely to cast a ballot as the general population, and twice as likely to vote as their non-college peers, studies show.

This year, with a tight presidential race and a \$3.1 billion state college bond referendum at stake, N.C. students have launched campus voter registration drives, debates and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Some say they're more active than in recent years.

"There were students here lined up waiting to register to vote," said Chuck Lynch, UNC Charlotte vice chancellor of student affairs. "I don't remember ever

seeing this much interest in an election."

At UNC Chapel Hill, student leaders registered 1,913 new voters — twice as many as in 1996.

Because college students are less likely to be affiliated with a party, they are among the independent voters that presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore are courting.

In North Carolina, student support could also be key to passage of the college bonds, to expand and renovate the state's universities and community colleges.

"I expect even more college students than usual to vote this year," said David Warren, president of National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

"More colleges are making efforts to get out the vote. And students wondering whether their vote will have an impact this year can see from the polls that the answer is "Yes, absolutely."

Since the 1960s, the percentage of Americans ages 18 to 24 who vote has been declining. In 1964, more than half of young voters turned out. In 1996, only a third bothered to vote — by far the low-

est turnout of any age group.

"The problem is, only a minority of young voters are actually college students, and the rest of them don't vote," said Charles Prysby, a political science professor at UNC Greensboro.

Bush and Gore have tried to catch the eye of young voters. Gore has been on MTV and the cover of Rolling Stone magazine. Both candidates have traded zingers on the late night talk shows, and they're making speeches on college campuses.

Both campaigns have also dispatched young family members: Bush's nephew George P. Bush, serves as the national chairman of Students for Bush-Cheney, while Gore's eldest daughter, Karenna Gore Schiff, heads Gorennet, a grass-roots effort to sway young people.

But Alison Byrne Fields, spokeswoman for the registration drive Rock the Vote, said it will take more than token appearances to sway youthful voters, who in many cases are disillusioned.

Candidates need to talk about issues that interest young voters, she said, and this year's Medicare, Social Security and prescription drugs are hardly appealing.

Still, Byrne Fields said she expects many college students to cast ballots. Their No. 1 issue is education, she said — especially the candidates' plans to make higher education more affordable.

But there will always be students like Josh Reigle, a 20-year-old UNCC student who just didn't get around to registering.

"I'm busy. I have homework to do, friends to go out with," he said. "I just really don't think my vote would matter that much."

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said that he hopes the committee will get some advice and ideas at this meeting.

"At this point, we were hoping the cab idea would streamline," Dorre said. "We are going to explore other options as well."

According to Dorre, the program also needs the help of volunteers to be successful, and with a project this big, there are likely to be more problems along the way.

The SGA set aside over \$8,000 for Safe-Ride. According to Kyle L. Horton, SGA treasurer, this money was appropriated June 30, 2000 and will be in the Safe-Ride account for the remainder of the fiscal year. Should the project not materialize, the money will be rolled back into the general SGA fund. There is no official time limit set on when the project must be carried out.

Last year's SGA President Patrick Gunn said he is a somewhat disappointed that the program has

Just about every Carolina campus is trying to get out the vote.

Students at UNC Chapel Hill and N.C. State competed to see who could register the most people. UNC won. N.C. A&T sponsored a dance with free admission to registered voters. And UNCC signed up more than 1,000 students in a two-day drive. The school is running shuttles to early voting locations.

The efforts appear to be working.

UNC Chapel Hill junior Matt Hamilton, 20, who voted for the first time this year, said the bond was his main motivation.

"I probably wouldn't have gone out this year if it wasn't for the bond," Hamilton said.

Though figures are not yet available, elections officials in Mecklenburg and some other counties said student registrations seem to be up.

And at UNC Chapel Hill, hundreds of students have already voted at Morehead Planetarium, an early voting site on campus, said Orange County elections director Carolyn Thomas.

"It's definitely heavier than I expected," said Thomas.

The excitement has even rubbed off on some adults.

UNCC building manager Gerald Lane, 42, will be voting for the first time after an inspiring talk with student vice president Alan Brown.

"Alan was so shocked that I had never voted that he shamed me into registering to vote," Lane said. "I always thought students were apathetic, but that's changed. These students have more energy about politics than most adults."

taken so long to implement, but he understands the difficulty those working on it are having. Gunn believes that some of the difficulty is because of the lack of support from the UNCW administration.

"It's difficult to get support from the administration at such a conservative university," Gunn said.

According to Dorre some people view Safe-Ride as condoning alcohol consumption and underage drinking.

"That was not the intent or the purpose [of Safe-Ride]," Dorre said.

Jeanette N. DeRenne, an SGA representative and former Safe-Ride committee member, said she still feels optimistic about Safe-Ride. She has talked to other schools who have built similar programs and doesn't think Safe-Ride is taking longer than theirs is to get off the ground.

"There's a lot of red-tape," Derenne said. "Its basically like starting your own business. For a student trying to take classes, it's a lot of work."

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