

UNCA campus gears up for 2012 presidential election

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Many students prepare to vote in their first election this November with help from student political organizations and enthusiasts, according to on-campus organizations. These enthusiasts guide students through the process of registration, polling and providing knowledge on candidates and issues to create well-informed voters.

The 2012 election proves relevant for many students with issues such as healthcare, sustainability and various social issues on the forefront. For college students, rising tuition and unemployment directly affect day-to-day life.

"Some of the big issues certainly revolve around the funding for our education. We talk a lot nationally about election, but many economic decisions are done through the state and should get more attention," **Ben Judge, SGA president and political science student**, said. "After college, everyone is asking, 'Am I going to be able to get a job?' If you have a degree, you will likely be able to find a job, but then it's a matter of whether it's a good paying job. The big issue is making sure whoever is leading the country will consider recent graduates when repairing the economy."

In March 2012, 12.6 percent of eligible voters age 18 to 29 found themselves unemployed, compared to 6.7 percent of eligible voters age 30 and older, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

"For people our age, the main issues will be about things such as the loss of Pell Grants and rising tuitions. There are candidates on each side trying to reserve that money or reduce it, and the economy in general will greatly affect the student body voters. No one wants to graduate college and then have no job prospects after spending several years worth of money and time studying toward their



Student Government Association President Ben Judge said SGA hopes to get UNCA students to the polls this November. Photo by Emily Foley - Staff Photographer

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SGA president

degree," said **Scott Mermel, political science student and sophomore SGA senator**.

According to CIRCLE, young people between the ages of 18 to 29 consist of 24 percent of the eligible voting population.

Although college students demonstrate lower voter turn-

out, they typically head movements pertaining to major social issues among their communities according to the report. During this particular election season, many voters on college campuses focus on matters involving contraceptives, abortion and LGBT rights.

"Gay marriage and women's rights are incredibly important to Ashevilleans. The more fired up people get during election season, the more participation. As students, we are about 3,700 votes. That's a significant difference. If our campus gets fired up, hopefully other campuses will as well," 20-year-old Judge said.

According to CIRCLE, there are 17 million new eligible voters since the last presidential election. Currently, eligible young voters ages 18 to 29 account for 46 million voters.

"Voter mobilization is one of

the most effective ways to get younger people to vote. Many students do not have cars, or feel left out of the electoral process for whatever reason. Any last minute encouragement to register people helps," said **Dolly Mullen, an associate professor of political science at UNC Asheville**. "During the election season, students should make sure to offer rides to the polls or give your friends registration forms, and chances are, they will help others to do the same."

Studies conducted through CIRCLE found 87 percent of students ages 18 to 24 who registered to vote actually voted.

"We just had the event Rock the Vote, Rock the Boat, through campus rec., where people got to participate in kayak roll sessions and got students registered to vote. People just need to know how to get

registered and where. Getting them to the polls is the biggest hurdle," Judge, of Chapel Hill, said.

In 2010, only 13 percent of college students said the reason they did not vote was due to a lack of interest, according to CIRCLE. Other major problems included transportation or not registering in their area.

Juliana Grassia, a psychology student, holds the position of secretary for the College Democrats at UNCA.

College Democrats team up with other student organizations throughout the year and host events encouraging students to register and vote. Events include Get Out the Vote and Rock the Vote.

"Rock the Vote is aimed toward getting people registered to vote. It is important for out-

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