



Oregon Student Association

635 NE Dekum St.

Portland, OR 97211

An Open Letter to Oregon University System Board; OUS Campus Presidents; Community College Board members; Community College Presidents on the importance of civic participation

As the academic year begins we are met with unique circumstances. The national financial crisis has led to increased unemployment and increased demand for public services including education and retraining. In response and in order to balance the budget legislators cut \$2 billion from the state general fund and passed two tax increases. Signature gathers collected more than double the required signatures to refer the two tax increases to the voters and a referendum on these measures will be held January 26, 2010.

In comparison to presidential elections, fewer voters participate in special elections. Moreover, students and members of the post-secondary education community will be directly impacted by the referendum. So with a broad coalition of organizations around the state we are headed back to school and gearing up for non-partisan voter registration, presentations on the result of “yes” and “no” votes, as well as efforts to increase voter participation leading up to the special election.

Students are leading the way with peer to peer non-partisan registration, education, and get out the vote efforts but we cannot do this alone.

In 2007 the Governor signed into law Senate Bill 951. This statute *requires* that each community college and state institution of higher education adopt a plan, in consultation with the recognized student government of each college or institution, to increase student voter registration and voting in elections.

The law incorporates a number of elements including:

- A plan for all students to receive information about voting and where students can register to vote on campus,
- A requirement that all students have information about voting law and penalties for particular activities
- A plan for distribution and collection of voter registration cards during the first three weeks of each term,
- Requirements that voter registration cards be made available across campus in residence halls, bookstores, registrar offices, as well as financial aid,
- Requirements that college and institution administrators communicate with faculty, staff, and students about deadlines for voter registration,
- A campus-wide advertising campaign to advise students on deadlines.

Despite the language in Section 2 of SB 951 requiring community colleges and state institutions of higher education to adopt plans, it appears that we all still have more work to do in completing these plans this fall leading up to a likely special election and in preparation for 2010 elections.

Groups representing students and faculty are assembling a statewide plan as the backdrop of activity to increase voter participation.



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This includes:

- Back-to-school voter registration during orientation (dependent on finalization on institutionalization plans and access to “residence halls, bookstores, registrar offices, as well as financial aid”).
- Voter registration throughout the term on campus and in group presentations
- Short class presentations for voter registration
- Class presentations on the result of a “yes” vote and a “no” vote.

We look forward to this work and hope each university will tackle the project of meeting the requirements of SB 951 with haste and full student, faculty and staff involvement.

We are excited about the opportunity that this special election presents to meet the legal goals and requirements of Senate Bill 951 by creating plans that provide students the information they need to participate in this very important election, and provide a framework for increasing civic participation on campuses.

Sincerely,

Oregon Student Association
American Federation of Teachers-Oregon
Associated Oregon Faculties