

Creative Campus Voting Project

SparkVotes Parties

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in collaboration with students from:

Turn Up Turnout
UMMA Student Engagement Council
School of Music, Theatre and Dance
Big Ten Voting Challenge
Ginsberg Center

Over the course of two years, we researched the most challenging aspects of the voting process for U-M students, gathering insights from campus partners, student interviews, and our local clerk. With these priorities in mind, we designed a series of games that target details of the voting process (particularly vote-by-mail) and deliver non-partisan information critical to removing stumbling blocks for student voters.

Knowing the importance of centering peer-to-peer interactions, we developed a COVID-safe, digital party experience that put this essential voter education into a social, festive, gamified form.

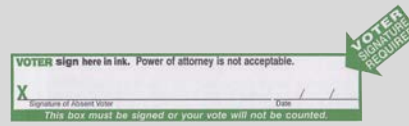
Our project prototype reached over 100 University of Michigan students:

- 20 students stepped up to host a SparkVotes Party and lead a virtual gathering for their friends, and the
- 90 students who participated as guests (during test sessions and the October 17th launch) were welcomed into a social atmosphere where peers could feel comfortable learning together.



SparkVotes Parties were designed so that guests worked together in teams to compete in a series of four games. Videos (featuring student actors, *above*, from the U-M School of Music, Theater and Dance) were embedded into the party deck to explain game play and ensure consistent informational messaging. Each game had a unique format and emphasized different knowledge.

1	Anya Ballot	5	Anya Ballot
2	Anya Ballot	6	Anya Ballot
3	Anya Ballot	7	Anya Ballot
4	Anya Ballot	8	Anya Ballot



How you sign your ballot envelope **matters**.

GAME 1: Count My Ballot

Participants race to identify the two signatures that match well enough for an absentee ballot to be verified and counted. This signature match challenge makes students aware of the level of accuracy that will be required between their absentee ballot and their signature on file in order for their ballot to be counted

GAME 2: Not-so-Trivial Pursuit

Participants “buzz” in to be the first to answer voting-related questions. Questions focus on voting and vote-by-mail rules, helping students learn about the process and important deadlines.

Q3:

What fashion choices could get you bounced from the polls on Election Day?

Partisan buttons, t-shirts and political accessories.

Q5:

As a college student, what address can you use to register to vote?

Either your permanent address or your student (campus) address.

Treasure

5 Find the most confusing sentence in the ballot proposal section. Try to **explain it**.

GAME 3: Ballot Quest

Working together in a break-out room, each team has 12 minutes to find five treasures “hidden” throughout a sample ballot. The game familiarizes students with a ballot format and helps them understand its various sections.

Your team has 12 minutes to find and capture the 5 treasures

- 1** Find the candidate with the shortest name, and **draw the symbol** of their political party.
- 2** Find a candidate running to represent Ann Arbor voters in Lansing. Figure out **how many minutes** it takes to walk from their official campaign office address to the state capital?
- 3** Find an object in your house that **rhymes** with one of the candidate names. **WIN bonus points for extra objects!**
- 4** Find a candidate running in a non-partisan race. **Screenshot an endorsement** that suggests which party will be happier to have them in office.
- 5** Find the most confusing sentence in the ballot proposal section. Try to **explain it**.

GAME 4: Step Up Song Challenge

Participants identify their next move in their voting plans. Then they are challenged to give a hint — through song — to see if others can guess their next step. The game engages students to plan their voting logistics and make the plan more concrete by sharing it.



We researched, developed, iterated, and delivered the SparkVotes Parties prototype within a short period of time and a dynamic set of changing public health parameters. Activities outlined below:



jan

feb

mar

apr

Sharing Parties beyond U-M

- adapted party materials for use on other campuses in Michigan
- shared with Sally Marsh at MI Secretary of State's office
- one-on-one follow-up to (mostly out-of-state) inquiries from the SLSV listserv
- shared with CEEP / CVP MI heads, who sent links to their fellows at other MI campuses
- communicated with civic engagement students / staff on other U-M campuses

Assessment

- IRB exemption process
- consulted with other evaluation teams, developed question sets and designed ways to embed them into game play
- deployed Qualtrics surveys to gather feedback from both party hosts and guests
- analysis of 50 guest surveys and 21 host surveys (re: experience of games re: knowledge gain, social experience, civic confidence)
- trained student research assistant to conduct follow-up interviews with party hosts
- conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 student hosts to deepen our understanding of themes and insights gathered via Qualtrics surveys
- synthesized data and identified successes and opportunities for future directions of the project

Insights : successes

Our assessment of this project prototype, which blends peer-to-peer social interactions with voter education, suggests that SparkVotes Parties are a viable model for:

- engaging students in civic participation and moving students from the intent to vote to action
- increasing student knowledge of voting (rules and process)
- increasing student confidence about their ability to navigate the voting process
- facilitating peer-to-peer mentorship and co-learning



team photo op!

learning together through competitive fun is an effective engagement strategy

Participants were clear that they enjoyed engaging in SparkVotes Parties. Particularly in the divisive climate of the 2020 Election, students appreciated “being able to interact with people about politics in a nonpartisan way” and having a low-key and social access point to civic participation. As one noted, “It made voting feel fun and exciting rather than [like] a chore.”

“Voting law and the procedures are a crazy labyrinth to navigate... the party definitely made it more fun and engaging.” *host*

One host reflected that their friends “got very competitive... there was some tension, but in a good way, I think. because it made them think and want to learn about the content to win.”

“It was a fun little package that prompted conversations more naturally, ... it was definitely helpful with making sure people don't get discouraged by the bumps that are in the road” *host*

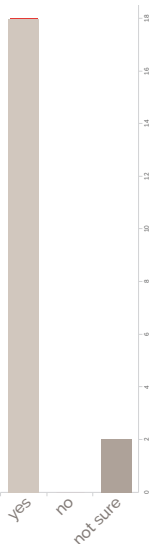
the parties increased student knowledge and confidence

Surveys confirmed that students learned important information from both the games and their conversations. Specific voting details were embedded in the games, for instance, how to sign the back of your absentee ballot envelope so that your ballot is counted. Additional learning came from student interactions during the party. One respondent described the party as “a good way to teach us to talk about voting.” The game play created comfortable opportunities to ask questions, share resources and encourage each other.

“It’s great to meet other people and discuss how to vote. It definitely increased my confidence in the process.” *guest*

90% of hosts

18 of 20 respondents



88% of guests

44 of 50 respondents



90% of hosts and 88% of guests reported on the survey that they “learned new information from the SparkVotes Party that clarified the voting process.”

Similar numbers (90% of hosts and 85% of guests) said they “discussed [their] individual voting questions and plans” with their friends during the party.

Note: Our survey reached student hosts and guests who participated in SparkVotes Parties on October 17th. The overall host response rate was 100% (20 of 20); the response rate for guests was 87.7% (50 of 57). Not all respondents answered all questions.

the parties reduced anxiety and helped students move from intent to action

Both hosts and guests reported feeling more capable and inspired to navigate the voting process. One guest noted that “being able to discuss voting in a calming and fun way allowed for us to all talk about our plans for voting.”

“There were people ... on the fence as to whether or not they were going to actually vote, and after going through the party and finding out where they could look up information on the candidates, everyone seemed more willing to actually follow through.” *host*

the peer-to-peer experience fostered a sense of collective agency and built civic capacity

Our approach — based on small, peer-initiated, gatherings of friends—created opportunities for student leaders and other “voting champions” to engage in a meaningful and fun way with their peers.

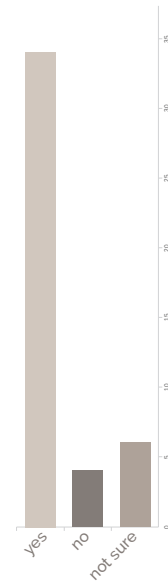
“I enjoyed learning what my friends knew and seeing them be excited about voting.” *host*

One student described hosting a party as “helpful to get [friends] energized, to not just feel sort of overwhelmed by voting and by the political climate, to feel a little bit more optimistic... 'I can handle this, it looks like my friends can handle this.'...It felt good.”

“I think it made me more empowered to get my friends into caring about voting and the civic engagement part... made me more comfortable talking with my friends about those things for sure.” *host*

“voting positive” energy continued for guests and hosts post-party

The parties led to conversations and post-party engagement. One host said, “having people reach back out to me, that made me feel really good, like, Wow, you not only formulated a plan in this party, but now we’re trying to carry it out, and then also feel that I can be a resource to you which makes me really happy to be able to provide that kind of assistance.”



77% of guests
34 of 50 respondents

77% of guests said that “participating in the SparkVotes Party helped [them] feel more comfortable to encourage friends and family to vote or participate in politics in other ways.”



Rachael Rettie



Morgan Tucker

U-M Stamps students created social media graphics to recruit hosts.





growing the project : future opportunities

Insights from our assessment point to seven key goals for future work:

- **Develop more intuitive game formats with a focus on competitive fun**
Respondents were most comfortable and reported having the most fun with the game structures that were most familiar to them and allowed them to feel the competition most directly. Going forward we hope to collaborate with a game design expert to keep the energy of varied game formats without sacrificing the ability to quickly, intuitively understand the game play.
- **Explore a broader range of party formats to engage more students**
More flexibility in timing and format could allow students to engage more easily with the project. Hosts mentioned that it would be easier to find a time to gather friends over a 4-day period. Our research assistant has been interviewing leaders in a range of student organizations to better understand how they plan group activities and explore how the parties could be integrated into their ongoing social gathering structures. We also heard great suggestions for additional structures — for instance, individual parties could be hosted in a common space with a “finalist round” tournament to follow.
- **Build out party follow-ons for more complex topics**
We came to recognize that there are limits to the depth of knowledge that can be transmitted in a single, social, party format but that the party could be a bridge to other resources and learning opportunities. In particular, we are exploring ways to help students feel more confident completing their ballot. There is clear interest from students for more support in this area and we are hoping to build out some additional tools — perhaps single-player digital games or an interactive exhibition (connected to our pop-up clerk’s office) — that could be introduced at the party.

- **Design structures to recruit, support and develop a cohort of hosts**

The student hosts in our pilot were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the experience. It was clear that those students who were most familiar with the content felt most prepared and confident leading their peers. Going forward, we are excited to design an "on-ramp" experience that makes hosting enjoyable for anyone who is interested, regardless of prior voting knowledge. A SparkVotes "pre-season + pizza" could prepare students to be peer mentors and expand the cohort of civic leaders and voting ambassadors on campus.
- **Expand reach through student organizations on campus**

With the benefit of time to plan and build relationships, we are re-searching how best to tap into the existing structures and calendars of campus student orgs. Our conversations with student leaders thus far indicate an excitement and interest in SparkVotes Parties and provide valuable insights as we work to expand the project. We are focused on meeting and working with more diverse groups across campus. The upcoming NSLVE data will be helpful in tailoring our efforts.
- **Expand Reach / Ease of dissemination across Michigan**

We are eager to continue the conversations that we started in 2020 with staff at the MI SOS, MI CEEP, CVP, etc. As we revise and streamline the games and formats, we aim to design an experience that can be more easily used on other Michigan campuses.
- **Build more evaluation into the project**

We hope to find funding and collaborators interested in helping us design and embed methods for assessing impact on both student hosts and their guests. We are interested to know outcomes such as whether students who participated in SparkVotes Parties voted and voted the full ballot at a rate higher than a control group and more detail about the contacts participants made with friends/others about voting after the party.

The SparkVotes Parties project was generously supported by a Students Learn, Students Vote Coalition Subgrant.

Additional funding provided by:

University of Michigan ArtsEngine

University of Michigan Office of Research

Thanks to our campus partners for testing and promoting the project:

Turn Up Turnout

Big Ten Voting Challenge/Ginsberg Center

UMMA Student Engagement Council

Stamps School of Art & Design

U-M Democracy and Debate Theme Semester

School of Music, Theatre, and Dance student actors:

Erik Dagoberg, Simone Clotile Headd, Paul Legallet,

Andrew Olchere, and Ruby Perez

Script and Video by Associate Professor Andy Kirshner



Creative Campus Voting Project

This ongoing research, co-led by Stephanie Rowden and Hannah Smotrich, investigates how the skills and sensibilities of art and design practice can help alleviate the challenges faced by student voters. We design inviting, celebratory experiences and materials that deliver practical, accessible information to engage and educate college-age voters. In Fall 2020, we focused on three initiatives:

SparkVotes Parties, a digital party package, created social opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and building confidence.

10 Tuesdays, a conceptual framework and a weekly micro-newsletter, helped students orient in time and stay on track of voting to-dos.

The Ann Arbor City Clerk's Satellite Office @ UMMA transformed a gallery in U-M's art museum into a welcoming hub for student voting.

www.creativecampusvoting.org

