Counting Votes

Election Day outcomes affect the community and college students

On November 6, Americans will flock to the polls to cast their ballots for the commander-in-chief, but very few will return to the ballot box for four more years. Voting today may lack the danger, revelry and fanfare of the country’s infancy, but the importance of casting a ballot hasn’t faded.

So why has voter turnout, particularly in elections closer to home, faded? That’s the question furrowing the brows of leaders and causing political scientists to ponder the future of democracy.

Research points to complaints about voter fatigue and voter apathy, reportedly based on “inconvenience” and frustration with “too many” elections issues and candidates they don’t like or understand, while others simply surrender and say, “My vote doesn’t matter.” In our on-demand society, there is no app for that.

“Call that the paradox of voting,” said Tyler Young, professor of political science at Collin College referencing the idea that the cost of (or effort) of voting exceeds the benefit and that one’s vote does not impact an election.

“At the end of the day, local government means a lot more to you than the federal government. Barack Obama doesn’t determine who the principal of the school is,” Young said.

School districts are governed and mostly funded locally. Transportation – from fixing the pothole on your street and building new highways, tollways or mass transit – is overseen on several levels from the state down. From gun laws to red-light cameras, most edicts are established on the city or state level. Of course, taxes, spending, budget cuts and services – or the lack thereof – are also determined at local levels by city councils, school boards, college boards and every other commission, board, taskforce, committee and quorum.

Locally, only three percent of registered voters in Collin County voted in the general and special elections last November. That’s 15,227 votes from the 425,312 registered voters in a county with a population of more than 25 million people.

Cities, states, and seats on various boards and councils. State turnout was five percent in a county of more than 800,000. Included on the ballot that day were 10 state constitutional amendments, propositions in McKinney, Plano and other cities, and seats on various boards and councils.

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In Plano, a city with a population of about 260,000, a little more than 4,700 voters dictated the passage of three propositions, including increasing city council member terms and providing the city council with the power to appoint judges to the municipal court. Just 1,574 voters in McKinney voted on a proposition expanding city council terms to four years. In a city of 136,000 people, it passed by just 158 votes. A margin of 575 voters determined whether the city of Frisco would revoke a commitment of bond funds for a performing arts center in Collin County.

In the May 2011 general elections, 10 races were decided by 100 or less votes. Seventeen were decided by 200 or less votes. Fifteen races included uncontested candidates.

Clearly, voting does matter, particularly on the state and local levels, whether we choose to participate or not.

Even more tragic is the number of young voters who, in spite of their rights in the 26th amendment, do not vote. Only 16.4 percent of 18-20-year-old Americans reported voting in the last Congressional election.

“The generation that is in college now will have to live with the decisions made today for many years to come, and those should not be made in abeyance,” said Cary A. Israel, district president of Collin College.

That is why the college created the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement. The center teaches college students the power of civic activism and ingrains a lifelong commitment to voting. The center hosts voter registration drives, debate watches, candidate forums and partners with MTV for their “Rock the Vote” campaign.

It’s an important time in the student lifecycle because voting is habit-forming. According to the Tufts University’s Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), “When young people learn the voting process and vote, they are more likely to do so when they are older. So, getting young people to vote early could be key to raising a new generation of voters.”

Collin College also volunteered to open campuses as official polling sites to make it easier for students, employees and members of the community to cast their ballots early on campus and avoid standing in line on election day.

“Voting is the responsibility of the citizen,” said Dr. Michael McConachie, dean of communication, humanities and social and behavioral sciences at Preston Ridge Campus in Frisco. “I always tell my classes that they’ve

Top students rate Collin College Honors Institute as ‘experience like no other’

Cameron Woolley’s first Collin College Honors Institute course – psychology – was unlike any experience he ever had in a classroom. During this class, he worked on original research and created a 10-page essay that resulted in findings that did not exist in the field at the time. His breakthrough then led to his first experience in publishing.

Excited and unable to shake this memory, Woolley, of Plano, was officially hooked.

According to Honors Institute Director Ryan Rynbrandt, students in the Honors Institute receive a unique and exceptional educational experience. “There is an excitement in the classroom, and the work is engaging and challenging.”

Woolley explained that professors in the program “push me one step further than I think I can go, and that is how I learned to challenge my perceived limits and go beyond my comfort zone into new territory. I know that I will be given the tools and motivation to perform the highest level of work I possibly can.”

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FEEDING FRENZY:
Microbiologist helps reduce parasite numbers

It looks like a sweet, innocent, little critter under the microscope. In fact, it resembles a swimming balloon with a smiling face. But don’t be fooled. Giardia is a parasite that feeds off humans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Giardia is one of the most frequent causes of waterborne disease (drinking water and recreational water) among humans in the United States.” In this world bursting with microbial life, how do you know your disinfectant will kill scary bugs like Giardia? You trust the laboratory skills of people like Natalie Lukomski.

Lukomski earned a Collin College associate of science degree in 2003, bachelor of science degrees in microbiology and biology in 2005 and a master’s of biology in 2008 from The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Today, she is a microbiologist/chemist at MicroChem Laboratory Inc.

“We test for disinfectant and antimicrobial efficacy for companies around the world. Companies want to make sure their products will kill a certain percentage of microbes at specific temperatures within a certain exposure time. We also perform product sterility testing,” said Lukomski.

Collin College was an obvious choice for Lukomski. Her younger sister and mother both graduated from Collin, and her older sister is currently taking paralegal classes at the college.

“Since I had to pay for my own education, having the option to take quality classes at a reduced cost and live at home really helped me financially. I was not sure I was going to pursue a science degree until I took Professor Cathy Donald-Whitney’s biology course. I learned and perfected titration in Dr. Amina El-Ashmawy’s class many years ago. I use that skill all the time at work on projects such as hard water analysis. I also learned stoichiometry from Dr. El-Ashmawy, and that was the basis of my research for my master’s thesis.”

Lukomski was impressed with the quality of the professors at her original alma mater.

“I would definitely recommend Collin College. It is an easier step forward in your education because the class sizes are smaller and the professors are focused on teaching and take time to help you. At a university, a microbiology class can have more than 200 students. If you put a lot of effort into your classes at Collin, you get a lot out of them.”

Lukomski enjoyed biology so much that she became a Collin College student assistant and worked in the laboratory at Spring Creek Campus.

“I got my basic lab skills and learned how to pour plates and make solutions and media. It is totally different really doing it than reading about it in books. When I transferred to UTA, I took an environmental microbiology class. My professor offered me the opportunity to work in the lab. He was very impressed that I already had basic lab skills. The foundation I received from Collin College helped with projects he was working on. Later, he offered me a position as a research assistant.”

In graduate school Lukomski was studying the microbial aquatic food webs with eukaryotic algae Ochromonas danica, which could potentially stimulate environmental conditions such as run off from fertilizers. Today, she does a lab coat, gloves, goggles, a mask and a face shield to work on BSL2 (biosafety level two) projects such as measuring the number of microbial colonies recovered from endoscopes, which are reprocessed and reused in hospital procedures multiple times each day.

“I’ve worked with several interesting organisms including E.coli O157:H7, Streptococcus pyogenes, Mycobacterium chelonae isolates, Mucor plumbeus, Eurotium chevalieri, Clostridium sporogenes (very stinky). As long as you have a healthy respect for these organisms, general safety gear is fine,” she said.

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“I am excited about the Giardia project. Protozoans are very interesting, and this one makes me smile. I love my job, working with a wide variety of microbes and performing new tests all the time. It was Collin College that provided me with a strong biology and chemistry foundation, along with my first hands-on laboratory experience, which allowed me to accomplish so much. I’m very grateful for all my wonderful, insightful professors who challenged me to work hard. I am looking forward to developing new products, like Aldahol High Level Disinfectant, which will soon be distributed worldwide and will help ease people’s lives.”

Natalie Lukomski

DEGREES
Associate of Science, 2003
Collin College
Bachelor of Science degrees in Microbiology and Biology, 2005
The University of Texas at Arlington
Master of Biology, 2008
The University of Texas at Arlington
CURRENT POSITION
Microbiologist/chemist at MicroChem Laboratory Inc.
Collin College launches new four-year strategic plan

This fall, Collin College is pulling back the curtain to reveal a much-anticipated, new strategic plan known as “Vision 2016.” It began more than a year ago when the college’s Board of Trustees held a retreat to frame a plan that would lead the college into its third decade. After revisiting the college’s mission and core value (at right), trustees reviewed demographics, budget forecasts, community needs, projections on higher education demand and progress on past initiatives to develop a philosophical foundation for the four-year plan.

“The nation’s economy is going through an era of tremendous change, and higher education must look forward if we want to lead our students and community to prosperity,” said Board of Trustees Chairman Mac Hendricks, of McKinney. “We believe it is important to create a collegiate educational experience that is accessible, meaningful, beneficial and attainable.”

For more information about Collin College’s Honors Institute, visit www.collin.edu/aboutus/honorstxt.html.

Honors Institute Perks

Aside from the support of professors, Honors Institute students gain a competitive edge along with the perks of learning in small classes designed to foster larger discussions. Additional incentives include an Honors Institute notation on the student’s transcript, the opportunity to publish research and access to special honors transfer programs with The University of Texas at Dallas and Texas Woman’s University – both of which automatically accept incoming freshmen who have at least a 3.5 GPA are eligible for the Honors Institute. The growth may be the result of satisfaction from students, like Guyer, who love it so much that they sing its praises. In fact, Guyer and fellow students created a student organization – The Honors Community – to promote the Honors Institute. “I have personally experienced greater participation from peers, more in-depth instruction from professors and opportunities to advance my academic career through Collin College’s Honors Institute,” she said. “Most of the peers I know who have taken honors classes find them incredibly rewarding and fun. In a perfect world, every class would be an Honors Institute class.”

Honors Successes

According to Woolley, Honors Institute courses also show students how to discuss advanced material with the confidence and polish of an expert. In fact, he credits the program for preparing him to handle the presidency of the Student Government Association at Collin College. Those valuable lessons will help this future-attorney tremendously as he begins a double major this fall in economics and risk management at Southern Methodist University. “Through Honors Institute courses, I gained new insights into collaborative project management,” Woolley said. “I attribute my success, in part, to the different approach to the learning environment of an honors classroom.”

Collin College students who have at least a 3.5 GPA are eligible for the Honors Institute. Incoming freshmen are also eligible if they have a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher. "Going through the Honors program is a fantastic experience," Professor Rynbrandt said. “The work is interactive and based around the students’ own interests, and you get to network with great students and professors. Collin College’s Honors program is an experience like no other.”

For more information about Collin College’s Honors program, visit www.collin.edu/Honors or call 972.881.5120.
Faculty & Staff HIGHLIGHTS

The Dallas Business Journal and Metropolis Technology Business Council named the Collin College engineering and technology department a finalist for the Tech Titans Technology Advocate Award. Nominated by the Frisco Economic Development Corporation, the award recognizes a local technology champion for outstanding leadership in advancing, assisting or accelerating the performance of technology companies and/or the technology community.

The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting presented the “Merit Award” to Collin College’s surgical technology program for the second year in a row. The honor is a tribute to Collin College’s initiative to pass rate on the Certified Surgical Technologist examination. Equally impressive is the percentage of Collin College surgical technology graduates who landed jobs: 100 percent!

Collin College has received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA). GFOA standards require that budget documents must be proficient in four categories to be eligible for the award; the budget serves as a policy document, a financial plan, an operations guide, and a communications device.

Candace Cooper, professor of developmental English, published the book Writing to Promote Cognitive Processing Effectively. Students used this book at the new Developmental Writing Boot Camp.

Dr. Svetlana Osetrova, professor of history, published a book titled A Predictive Model of Why Students Leave College at the 49th annual Forum of Association of Institutional Research in June.

Lisa Vasquez, vice president, public relations and college development, was elected to the Council of Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District 4 Board of Directors for a two-year term.

Collin College’s chapter of Psi Beta psychology honor society has earned the 2011-2012 Chapter Excellence Award from Psi Beta national. The chapter also received honorable mention for the Psi Beta Community Service Award 2012 and past president Laurel Cook was selected to receive the Psi Beta Community Service Award for 2012 for her work with the Angel Tree project.

Ralph Woods, student, placed second in Pearson Publishing’s National Writing Rewards Contest for his essay titled “The Rise of Social Media: The Downfall of Progress” and received a $500 prize. For Woods’s recognition, professor of developmental writing Marii Miles-Rosenfield received an honoree, which she donated to the English-as-a-Second-Language Excellence Fund.

Three Collin College athletes have received Academic Student-Athlete Awards from the National Junior College Athletic Association.

Dr. Istvan Csato, Shawn Shukla, and Steven Maggard helped lead Plano Police Explorer Post 911 to a state championship victory. The 15-member, post-sponsored by the Plano Police Department, beat 12 teams to win the state title for the fourth time in the past five years. Post 911 also named Collin College student Drew Rothenberger its “Rookie of the Year.”

The Harry Ransom Center, the arts and humanities research facility at The University of Texas at Austin, acquired a photograph by Byrd Williams, professor of photography, along with one photograph from his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. The four pieces — “Young Engineer” (1906), “B Hall” (1905), “Woman Downtown” (1937), and “Mary’s Room” (1921) — commemorate the “whole dynamic of the [Williams] family,” said Ransom senior research curator Roy Flukinger. Williams is a four-generation photographer. His photograph ‘Mary’s Room” is a 2011 collaboration with Elizabeth Metcalf, professor of photography.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded a $4.4 million grant to the National Convergence Technology Center at Collin College. This grant extends through July 2016 and is the fifth Advanced Technological Education grant awarded to Collin College since 1999. Founded in 2004, the National Convergence Technology Center is a partnership between Collin College and seven colleges and universities including El Centro College; the University of North Texas; Florida State College, Jacksonville, Fla.; Fox Valley Technical College, Appleton, Wis.; Lansing Community College, Lansing, Mich.; Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa, Calif.; and Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Ga.

Together, Collin College and its partners will collaborate to develop program improvements to meet workforce needs by equipping faculty to teach emerging technologies demanded by the workforce. furnishing technology-enabled instructional support systems to assist colleges in developing convergence programs, increasing the number of completers with certificates and degrees ready to meet workforce needs and building capacity by mentoring colleges nationwide in implementing new programs in convergence technology.
Weekend College keeps time on student’s side

For Tim Jackson, it was a matter of time. He did not have enough of it, and he needed more to finish a college degree.

Working full time, the 29-year-old stumbled upon Weekend College at Collin College. Things fell into place.

“I was finishing up my associate’s degree, and I needed those classes to graduate,” Jackson said. “I was working Monday through Friday, and the only time to take classes was the weekend. It really worked out for my schedule.”

Weekend College has become one of Collin College’s most popular alternatives for attaining a degree. In 2008, there were 5,994 students enrolled in Weekend College. By the end of 2011, enrollment jumped to 6,965 students coming to classes on the weekend.

“Weekend College aligns closely with the community-centered mission of Collin College,” said Dr. David Green, director of Weekend College. “Most Weekend College students are highly motivated and committed to completing courses, in addition to balancing a full schedule of other activities.”

The brutal truth is that there are simply not enough hours in the day for most working adults – no matter how many jobs or children he or she is trying to juggle – to earn a degree. Collin College paves many avenues for those individuals to achieve their goals and dodge the roadblocks keeping them out of college.

Dr. Green said Weekend College student body includes single or stay-at-home parents and those wanting to re-enter the job market as well as students seeking to accelerate their academic progress or those anticipating a career change.

“The Weekend College student population is a representative cross section of Collin College students,” Dr. Green said. “It is not unusual to have students who want to complete a degree in a shorter time frame take courses in Weekend College as well as those who are working full time or changing careers.”

Jackson, during the summer of 2012, took two classes on Saturday for about a 10-week period. Added up, the classes took eight hours a day, but Jackson said that the format enhanced what he learned from the courses.

“We do cover a lot,” Jackson said. “But it has been easier for me especially coming back to school. It’s more of a relaxed environment, and we spend the time wisely. Everyone is on board. We don’t waste a lot of time. Being a four-hour class, we have more time to review and go over things that we didn’t quite grasp.”

Weekend College is offered in two distinct formats depending on the individual’s schedule or comfort. The standard 16-week format meets once a week on Friday evenings, Saturday or Sunday. The express block offers a three- or eight-week format on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Election Day Outcomes

been raised with the idea that if you don’t vote, you can’t complain. Your complaining is a freedom of speech. But I follow up with the idea that if you do complain, doesn’t it carry more weight if you vote? When candidates are complaining is a freedom of speech. But I follow up with the idea that if you don’t vote, you can’t complain. Your

In 2011-12, $24.4 million in Pell Grants were awarded to Collin College students. “It is not unusual to have students who want to complete a degree in a shorter time frame take courses in Weekend College as well as those who are working full time or changing careers.”

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However, money is just the tip of the civic engagement iceberg. Recent decisions made in Austin that tie directly to life on campus in Collin County range from whether to allow concealed handguns on campus, which failed, to a law requiring all new college or university students to get a meningitis vaccination before registering for class, which passed.

Ironically, the movement to lower the voting age to 18 evolved after the era of 1960s campus activism leading up to the Vietnam War. Young Americans argued that if they were old enough to be drafted and sent into combat overseas at 18, then they were mature enough to vote. Today, members of the military and their spouses vote at much higher rates than the general public, but 18-year-olds do not.

‘Active-duty troops and senior citizens vote for a reason—because they know they have ‘skin in the game.’ We all do, and there are too many reasons to let an election pass without voicing our opinions on public policy,” said President Israel. "Collin College has the lowest tuition in the state of Texas, but nearly 26,000 students applied for financial aid. There are 55,000 students annually at Collin College, and they stand to be a powerful voice at the poll. Campus activism may have changed since the 60s and 70s, but students and our communities are no less committed to what is right.”

The act of voting – and voting thoughtfully – is the most basic tenet of civic engagement. A broad swath of informed and motivated citizens is the catalyst for a government by and for the people.

For information about the upcoming elections, polling places and more, visit www.co.collin.tx.us/elections. For more information about the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement, visit www.collin.edu/academics/cce.

Students can complete their core curriculum and earn an associate of arts or science degree through Weekend College. Core classes completed on the weekend can be transferred to a university if the student chooses to continue his or her journey. There also are plans to add tracks for certificates and marketable skills achievement awards.

Jackson transferred to The University of Texas at Dallas this fall with plans to earn a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary studies and continue his career in real estate. The veteran is using the GI Bill to pay his way through higher education.

“You can sacrifice a Saturday for a couple of weeks to get what needs to get done,” Jackson said. Visit www.collin.edu/academics/weekendcollege to learn more. Call the Weekend College office at 972.881.5801 or email weekendcollege@collin.edu for more information.
Estimated population of Collin County: 823,981
Registered voters in Collin County: 423,312
Percentage of voters who cast a ballot in November 2011 elections: 3%
Number of votes that passed a measure extending terms for McKinney City Council to four years: 158

Policy issues affected by your vote:
- HANDGUN LAWS
- SCHOOLS
- ROADS
- HIGHER EDUCATION
- FINANCIAL AID
- RED-LIGHT CAMERAS
- VACCINATIONS

Did you know that you can vote on campus at Collin College? Avoid the lines on election day and vote early at any of these four campuses:
- Central Park Campus, 1st Floor, C Wing
  2200 W. University Drive
  McKinney, TX 75071
- Preston Ridge Campus, University Hall
  9700 Wade Boulevard
  Frisco, TX 75035
- Spring Creek Campus, atrium
  2800 E. Spring Creek Parkway
  Plano, TX 75074
- Collin Higher Education Center, atrium/lobby
  Northeast corner Hwy. 121 and U.S. 75
  3452 Spur 399
  McKinney, TX 75069

For more info, call 972.881.5927.

STUDENT ACTIVISM
Last fall and spring, Collin College students volunteered for the following different community organizations:

Adam’s Animals
American Cancer Society
Baal Dan, India
Blue Star Mothers
Boys and Girls Club, Frisco
Carter Blood Care & Plano
Sunrise Rotary
Children’s Advocacy Center of Collin County
Children’s Medical Center, Dallas

City of Frisco
City of Plano
C.I.T.Y. House, Plano
Community Children
Foreman Elementary School, Plano/
Chinese Institute of Engineers
Homeless in Dallas
Hope’s Door
International Rescue Committee
Lakeside Community Theater
Malaria Foundation
Mathews Elementary, Plano
North Texas Food Bank
Overseas Soldiers
Plano Children’s Clinic
Razor Elementary, Plano
Samaritan Inn, McKinney
Soldiers’ Angels Network
SOS Children’s Village
Spina Bifida Association
Sunrise Senior Living, Plano
Susan G. Komen
Veterans of Plano
Vietnam Children
Webb Elementary, McKinney
Wounded Warrior Project

Organizations listed include fall 2011 and spring 2012 student volunteer locations.

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