

Western Kentucky University

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Rock the Vote

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"Rock the Vote"

Rock the Vote (sponsored by MTV) is designed to engage and mobilize young people in the political process by incorporating the entertainment community and youth culture into pre-election activities. The university's event attracted approximately 1,500 students in fall 2004.

Organizers, Sponsors, and Institutional Involvement

WKU's first ever Rock the Vote event was organized by the gay and lesbian student association (the Outlet Alliance) and the women's studies program. In addition, local officials and candidates attended the event. Most importantly, 567 students registered to vote at the event, which featured four local bands, free food and beverages, and information booths set up by groups including College Republicans, College Democrats, and Amnesty International. Other booths were run by international programs, both mayoral candidates, and special-interest groups from campus as well as the community. Rock the Vote will become a permanent part of our annual Constitution Week in fall 2006 as a kick-off event.

Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of the university's event was to generate positive changes in our students' social and political lives and create a connection between our university and the community. Other objectives were to increase voting by students and other young people, improve voter education, and ensure that young people take advantage of their right to vote. Those qualitative goals and objectives were established by the Outlet Alliance in accordance with MTV's agenda for the national Rock the Vote campaign.

Audience

The target audience for Rock the Vote primarily was students. Approximately 25 student organizations set up information booths geared toward political and social issues. Booths offered brochures, bumper stickers, fact sheets, and other items. Attendance tickets were given to students seeking extra credit in courses. Faculty and staff were also invited, and many attended the event.

Project Planning and Timeline

The planning for this event began at the end of the spring semester of 2004. The Outlet Alliance asked for volunteers for the planning committee during the summer of 2004. The committee met twice during the summer to pick a date for the event and plan other activities. At the beginning of the fall 2004 semester, the committee met with the director of the women's studies program to finalize plans and request help with promotion. The event was set for September 16 (three weeks after classes began), from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., in order to accommodate the Kentucky deadline for registering to vote. The event was staged outdoors on a grassy lawn area in front of the campus health and fitness center. All advertising for the event was done through e-mails and fliers posted around campus.

Budget

Although highly unusual, this project did not have an established budget. All bands, organizations, and people who registered voters volunteered their time for the event. Most participants were students, but a few faculty and staff helped with different activities. Food (hot dogs and sodas) was provided by our campus food-service company, Aramark.

Assessment

Primarily qualitative methods, such as speaking with students at the event, were used for evaluation and assessment. Quantitative methods in terms of a "head count" were also used for evaluating the project. Approximately 1,500 students attended Rock the Vote, and more than 550 students registered to vote. The attendance was about what the organizers expected, but the planning committee had set a goal of registering 1,000 students at the event. Many students attending, however, were already registered voters, so finding creative ways to attract those not involved in the voting process should be addressed.

Lessons Learned

In the case of the 2004 election, timing was crucial in order to get students registered before the Kentucky deadline for voter registration. However, waiting until a few weeks before an election is not always necessary. Voter registration, education, and participation should be ongoing concerns on college campuses. Including an annual Rock the Vote is an entertaining way to encourage students to become involved in the political process. It is also important to include as many departments, student organizations, and local officials as possible in the planning. Identifying campus and community resources can allow you to operate on a small budget. In addition it is imperative to direct event advertising at students who are not registered to vote and/or have not participated in the political process before.

