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By Aaron Farmer

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With absentee voting deadlines approaching at the end of February, Radford University's student government is preparing its Voting Action Office (VAO) to meet the needs of students voters in this year's presidential election.

Nick Thayer, a social work major and Secretary of Legislative Affairs for the SGA, heads the VAO along with other student volunteers who have been trained as deputy registrars since the office was created last fall.

"There are about a dozen volunteers," Thayer said, noting that around 150 students used the office to register for local elections last semester - with an even higher turnout expected this fall.

“... for next years presidential elections I would expect to register at least 1,000 students starting in the fall. Presidential elections always generate more excitement among voters,” he said.

With a student body from across the United States, many Radford campus residents cannot make the trip home to vote in person - or simply do not have enough time on a Tuesday to make it to the polls.

Thayer explained how he has worked closely with local government leaders like Radford’s City Registrar Tracy Howard to make sure students are covered

“I am in contact with Mr. Howard at least once or twice a week. Whenever I have been given voter applications, I take them to Tracy’s office and he does the rest. He and SGA President Colby Bender have done an incredible job and invested a lot of time in getting the Voting Action Office started this year,” said Thayer.

Although many students are excited to take part in the electoral process, turnout numbers for young voters show that not everyone is on board.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of adults age 18-34 who actually voted in 2014 fell short of the total eligible population of young voters by 13.2% - an increase from 11.6% and 12.1% in 2006 and 2010, respectively - meaning that even though young voters continue to make up more and more of the voting population each year, the number of young adults who actually vote is not keeping up.

“We learn in middle school that the only priority political parties have is to win elections, however they can. To do so they need votes. If college students do turnout to vote, we show our politicians that they need the support of college students to win,” said Thayer, referencing the steep decline in debt-free financial aid coverage for students in Virginia, despite the steady increase of tuition rates statewide.

Student debt continues to be a major issue for all contenders in this year’s presidential election, with democratic candidates like Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton calling for massive reform of the federal financial aid system and even free college tuition for all citizens at public universities.

Even Donald Trump - a strict conservative praised by supporters for his business-savvy background - has scolded the federal government for profiting so heavily on student debt.

“It’s not necessarily about changing our representatives, it’s about changing their priorities.

And we do that by voting,” said Thayer. “Election day is the only time of year that our voice and opinion has as much power and authority on the direction of the country as our representatives in Richmond and in Washington. We cannot let that power and privilege to vote go to waste.”

The deadline for absentee voting in Virginia by mail is Feb. 23 and the deadline for in-person absentee voting is Feb. 27.

For more information on absentee voting or volunteering with the SGA or VAO to help get students registered, contact Nick Thayer by email at [nthayer2@radford.edu](mailto:nthayer2@radford.edu), by phone at (703) 401-1301, or stop by the SGA offices upstairs in the Bonnie.