

Bard Voting at Bard Podcast

0:00 Josh: Welcome back everybody! I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission, and we're here to talk about voting at Bard today. As always, I'm here with the Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens.

00:11 Mackie: Hello everyone! As Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, Director of Admission, and a proud Bard alumna. We're joined by two current students today do you guys want to introduce yourselves?

00:20 Ava: Hi, I'm Ava Mazzye, I'm a senior at Bard College, studying political studies, and I am the Director of Election@Bard.

00:29 Adrian: Hi, my name is Adrian Costa, I'm a junior here at Bard, double majoring in political studies and theater & performance, which is fun!

0:38 Mackie: Great! Well, thank you both for joining us. We have a couple of questions that we want to ask to hopefully tease out exactly how students can be active here, and the kinds of work that Bard and Bard students are doing to educate people about exercising their right to vote. Can you tell us a little bit about the work that you do with regards to educating students about voting rights, the registration process, and the voting process?

1:04 Ava: So, the three main pillars of Election@Bard are to register, educate, and engage young voters. We start off with the registration process, when students first come to campus for L&T. When they are checking in, much like they might get their ID or their room number at any given table, they also stop at the voter registration table. We're a completely non-partisan group, and so we do like to inform students a little bit about the politics of the area, but doing so in a way where we do not pressure students to register with any given party. Obviously, we do a lot of education work as well. As soon as students come to campus, we like to get them to start to get to know the people that represent them in government, whether it be on the Red Hook town board, or the US Congress. And we love to get these students better acquainted with their elected representatives either by showing them the ways in which to navigate their websites, see what kinds of bills they're voting on, to see how to contact these folks, so that they're able to share their political opinions with them.

2:17 Mackie: Cool!

2:18 Adrian: Yeah, just to add on to what Ava said, I think that it's especially important in the political climate that we are in right now, to engage young people as much as possible in the political environment as they come of age and become voters who are active in the polity, as they would say in Political Studies, but I think that these traditions and practices of what it means to be engaged in your community, not just at the local level, but federal, everything, it helps people build these skills and build these traditions as they continue throughout their lives. So, when people start voting when they're 18, they vote for their rest of their lives, and that's really important to us to keep that legacy going.

3:07 Josh: Yeah, great! Could you tell us a little bit about what motivated each of you to get involved in rallying voters and speaking to the importance of voting at Bard, or in general?

3:22 Adrian: Yes, well, for me, I am from New York City, which is a very blue area. Coming up to Annandale was a sort of a culture shock for me and I wanted to engage the, because I'm a double major I wanted to engage the political side of mine, and I thought that looking at this concept of voting, and looking at it in a non-partisan way was really important to me. I started interning under Ava, and it really taught me about how polemical the situation is here, and how important it is to get involved, to get students involved in the decision making and the election process of this local county that they're living in, because at the end of the year, ten months of the year, we're spending on campus, and we're spending going to school year. So, it's really important that we make sure that students have their voices heard. So, I delved into that process and I think that's it's been extremely rewarding, in terms of professional development, organization, you know, coordination with events and volunteers, and it's helped me really develop as a person, a community organizer, and as an engaged citizen, which I think is really important.

4:50 Ava: I personally have always also been a little concerned with accessibility when it comes to voting. Like Adrian, I grew up in New York City as well, I was in Brooklyn when the primaries were happening in the lead up to the 2016 presidential election. I saw a lot of issues of accessibility in terms of very early voter registration deadlines for primaries in particular. So, I was really inclined to get into this sort of work at Bard and I was lucky enough to see that Bard College is partnered with the Andrew Goodman Foundation, which is a group that provides us with a lot of support when it comes to the voting work that we're doing.

5:44 Mackie: Great! Actually, I just want to touch on something that you both mentioned, we're talking specifically about students getting students involved, and starting those traditions early on of voting, knowing how to do it, and knowing how to educate yourself about all of the candidates and also starting at a local level too and being mindful of that. But could you speak a little bit to how the wider community here, is sort of engaged in that process? How students work with local community members, given that there is a sort of political divide in the area, and there are Democrats and Republics, sort of living in District 19?

6:36 Ava: Sure! So, what you're saying is totally correct. A lot of the area around us is a little bit red, turning purple, creeping into blue a little bit, but obviously the Bard vote tends to be a little bit bluer. And so that can sometimes create a little bit of conflict between students and community members. We have had a somewhat interesting history of having some kinds of conflicts at local polling places, especially in very local elections, which community members tend to raise some very valid concerns about Bard sometimes being the deciding vote in local elections, which is something that we should all think critically about. But, that being said, we have found that tons of community members are very supportive of students getting involved in the electoral process. In me and Adrian's role, we often are meeting with local elected officials, including the mayors of Tivoli and Red Hook, the two towns in which our off-campus student population lives in, and they love that we get involved with politics, because they know that our students are just as much members of the surrounding communities as non-students. And we know that students are no more transient than the average American, and so they have as much a right to vote here as anyone else does. And so, we have found that local community leaders, both elected officials and activists, have been pretty supportive of our efforts to get greater voting accessibility in the area.

8:12 Adrian: I also want to speak on our efforts not just the students at Bard, but serve almost, like, we go down to BHSEC schools and we go register students in high school to vote, and we teach them about the process and we teach them how to properly fill out those forms and make sure they are able to vote. We go to the Tivoli street painting festival and we table there and we register community members who are active in the communities to vote. So, our interest is not just for the Bard student but for everyone. It's important for us to be non-partisan, because want to be able to include all people and make it very clear to them that our mission is for engagement and for people to be involved in their communities, involved through voting.

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9:01 Mackie: And for those of you listening, the BHSECs or the Bard High School Early Colleges that Bard runs, they're all public schools, and students are getting their high school diploma there and two years of a college degree at our Bard High School Early Colleges. Just to give some context to those listening who might not know what the BHSECs are. There are a lot of acronyms at Bard, so, just wanted to clear that one up. Yeah, and so, how do students actually go about the process of voting when they're living on campus, and its election day? What happens?

9:34 Ava: We just got done with a big election day here. We had a pretty great turn out from what we can tell so far (Adrian: Yup!). Especially for an off-year election. But what it kind of looks like on election day is you'll pull up to the main bus stop on campus where tons of students tend to be getting on the shuttles, going to the nearby towns. Students are coming in to get to their classes in the morning, to get to work, and throughout the entire day you'll see a table, sometimes a big tent up, with some Election@Bard workers, either starting to text folks to let them know to get out to the polls today, giving folks food, and we've always have coffee –

10:18 Adrian: Oh, and so much food!

10:19 Ava: So, we try to make it really like a party, and so at the tables we've got all sorts of candidate information, sample ballots, we really try to talk folks through the process who have never voted before, or have never been in observation to these voting behaviors at home. Not everyone has a chance to go to the polling place as a kid. Some folks are really nervous about the process because it is kind of a scary one. And we tend to have shuttles that run to the polling place, which is just about 5 minutes down the road for students who are registered on campus, and those shuttles tend to run every half hour, so we make it very accessible. It's a quick trip. There don't tend to be very long lines and people tend to do this in between classes. We also have professors get on our shuttles to go vote, because they don't always have cars around. It's kind of fun, you'll often take the same shuttle as your political studies professor to go vote on election day. And then for students who move off campus, if they were previously registered on campus, they of course have to update their voter registration to reflect their current off campus address, and so we've got a few polling places which are accessible by Bard transportation in the local area as well. We tend to finish the day off either with some sort of celebration, or a results watch party. Again, because this year the races were very local, we didn't do so much a results watch party, but we got some local apple cider donuts, and gave them all out at night after the polls closed.

12:00 Adrian: And I will say that last election day, during the Congressional run, we hosted a very large watch party that was attended by over a hundred fifty students. We take those celebrations very seriously, and we just want to make sure that people have this idea or understanding of voting as something fun, and a positive and –

12:30 Ava: And it builds your community.

12:31 Adrian: It builds your community. I've never felt that much of a community at Bard as I did at that results watch party, celebrating together with my peers, because we engaged together! We got engaged!

12:45 Mackie and Josh: That's great!

12:47 Josh: You know, if students are looking to register to vote, is there a deadline that students should be aware of?

12:52 Ava: Yes! So, the upcoming voter registration deadline, for New York State, and of course you should check online to see if there are deadlines if you are interested in registering in other states, but for the upcoming presidential primary, which is happening in New York on April 28th, the deadline to register to vote is February 14th. And you always have to be careful about that, because that tends to mean it needs to be post marked by that date, so you've got to get it in before the mail goes out.

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13:25 Mackie: Cool! And if students want to get involved the way you guys are, how do they do that?

13:30 Adrian: Well, we are, like Ava said, we are extremely accessible on the first day of L&T and if you express any sort of interest to either me or Ava, or to any one of our peers who are working at the Election@Bard table on the first day of L&T, please, we will put your name down, we will make sure to have you in contact, as we love bringing in people who are dedicated to this work, and understand how important this work is. You can also visit us at the CCE, we have office hours every week, so if there's anything that you need from us, we're available to help you, and we're available to get you involved.

14:09 Ava: You can also reach us at election@bard.edu, if you send us an email at that address. We have students working with us in various capacities. We've got interns, we've got one-off volunteers but also sustained volunteers, and we've got folks that just want to plan, you know, one party at a time, one, let's say the Democratic Debate is coming up, we've got a student who wants to plan just that. So, we're really open to working with folks in whatever aspect they're interested in working with us.

14:37 Mackie: And what kind of fields have you seen students go into once they graduate from Bard, become alums, but also become professionals in their various different fields that they want to go off and explore, what kind of work have you seen them go into? Have these skills really benefited them after Bard?

14:56 Ava: So, Election@Bard is still relatively young, but we've been seeing our really active alumni going into law school. Lots of them have been doing fellowships with voting rights organizations, and it's a really great network to have. You often are seeing a lot of Bard alum at different conferences on voting rights, so it makes me feel very comfortable about the accessibility of going into these fields when I see Bard alumni have kind of taken these steps before me.

15:32 Mackie: Great. Well thank you both for joining us, it's been a pleasure. And for all of you listening, I hope it's been helpful. Definitely think about those dates and deadlines if you're approaching your eligibility to vote, but if you have questions for us here in Admission you can reach out to admission@bard.edu, or give us a call, our phone number is right there on our website. So, thank you all, and we will be tuning in with another podcast soon!

16:00 Josh: As always, we look forward to next time!