



Democracy Class: A lesson for engaging high school seniors

Program Guide

Summary

UT Votes members and Annette Strauss staff adapted [Rock the Vote's](#) Democracy Class lesson plan with Texas CHI information, and taught the 45-minute lesson to a local Austin high school. In this guide, we present the steps taken to successfully achieve the initiative.

Our plan differs from Rock the Vote's national lesson plan in a few key ways. First, we created our plan from the standpoint of college students looking to engage emerging adults. Second, we focused our introduction from a Texas perspective. Third, our Texas initiative was unique in that our UT Votes members were volunteer deputy registers, meaning we could register all eligible high school students in person. Finally, we adapted Rock the Vote's discussion and mock election activity in small ways, detailed in this guide.

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Develop a strategic plan-of-action

First and foremost, we needed to sit down and create a strategic plan-of-action for implementing the Democracy Class. We knew there were 3 key components to a successful outcome: Finding and confirming appointments with teachers, adapting and practicing the lesson plan with team members, and executing the activity to success. During an initial meeting with our Annette Strauss Director of Educational outreach, we mapped out the steps to success, assigning a date by which each step in the process would be completed.

Our steps were as follows:

1. Curate a list of local high school Government and Social Studies teachers

- a. A team member was tasked with finding the names and contact information of all local high school teachers who would be interested in having a university speaker come and register students to vote.

2. Gather Democracy Class toolkit

- a. Rock the Vote's lesson plan and materials are available online. By filling your information, you receive a lesson plan, PowerPoint slideshow, ballot sheet, and voter registration form, in addition to other useful handouts.
- b. The Democracy Class lesson plan and materials can be found [here](#).

3. Adapt lesson plan to fit Texas needs

- a. Our lesson differed from the original Rock the Vote lesson in that we created a PowerPoint near the beginning of the class that sought to educate high schoolers on the current state of political participation of Texans.
- b. We incorporated data from the [Texas Civic Health Index](#) – a report conducted by [National Conference on Citizenship \(NCoC\)](#) and the [Annette Strauss Institute](#).
- c. The youth and politics organization [Circle](#) also provided recent 2014 midterm election information on young adults 18-29, which we added to our PowerPoint introduction.
- d. Our UT Votes members were Travis County VDRs. Therefore, we were trained in helping people fill out their voter registration forms and were allowed to collect the cards and deliver them to the tax office. Any students that were ineligible to register to vote were instead given a *pink* 8.5x11 paper printout of a voter registration form that was printed with “FAKE” watermark. This way, students were able to practice to register to vote.
- e. We adapted [Rock the Vote's](#) lesson plan in a few more ways.
 - i. We removed the discussion regarding the Declaration of Independence.
 - ii. Mock Election: We asked for two volunteers to be our candidates *after* registering students to vote. We did not require the two students to debate on issues or answer class questions; however, we did ask them to write their names next to three issues they believed were most important, which were on the board as part of a list we created during the discussion section of the class. In addition, during the mock election, we had *all* students write ballots. However, we had printed out the ballots on *green* paper and *blue* paper. When we collected the ballots, we only counted the green ones as legitimate votes. We announced the winner, but then surprised them

with the information only half of the class was counted, and had we counted the entire class the election would have turned out differently. We used this as a lesson to show only small portion of young people vote, and if more took an active role in voting elections could turn out differently.

- f. Please visit Rock the Vote's [Democracy Class](#) website to view the original lesson plan. If you are interested further in how we adapted the lesson plan, please contact us directly at utvotes@gmail.com.

4. Determine what success looks like

- a. We adapted Rock the Vote's toolkit evaluation form and created a handout we would provide high school teachers on the day of the class in order to get a sense of how they felt the class went and whether they would have the class taught again or allow the Annette Strauss Institute to come speak to their students in the future.
- b. Our evaluation form also included a section for team members to fill out that documented how many students participated in the class and how many students we were able to register to vote using the yellow Travis County registration cards.
- c. This form can be found on Page 7.

5. Draft and send email to curated list of teachers

- a. A team member was tasked with creating a professional email detailing the lesson that would be sent to the curated list of teachers. You can view our email on Page 4.

6. Set a date for and send follow-up emails and phone calls

7. Create an information gathering form for teachers

- a. We created a sharable Google form which we sent out to teachers in order to gather information on their classroom technology, times of class periods they wanted Democracy Class taught in, and other useful information. The form questions can be found on Page 5.

8. Rehearse lesson with team members

- a. We gathered our UT Votes team members, read through the lesson plan, divvied up sections to lead among four people, and then rehearsed the lesson in front of remaining UT Votes members.
- b. Members were encouraged to take home a copy of the lesson plan to better familiarize themselves with the content.

9. Confirm date(s) with teachers

10. Gather materials

- a. One team member was tasked with printing out all paper materials and making sure the team would have all the necessary supplies.

11. Teach activity

12. Regroup with team members

- a. Coming back together with team members after the event to discuss what worked and what didn't (and documenting those thoughts!) makes for a more successful class in the future.

Sample Email

Below is a sample email to use when sending out asks to your curated list of high school educators. You can use this as a starting template, changing out the UT Votes specific language for your own organization.

Do you wish your students were more excited about voting and civic participation?
Would you like a guest speaker from UT Austin to come to talk to your students about voter registration?

I am an officer for a student group called [UT Votes](#), a sponsored campus organization committed to nonpartisan voter registration and education. Given our commitment to nonpartisanship, near-peer education and community, we're seeking opportunities to present an exciting new lesson on voter registration and civic engagement that is geared towards high school students.

Democracy Class plan includes:

- 45 minute lesson
- [Lesson](#) created by the nonpartisan organization [Rock the Vote](#), adapted for TX by the [Annette Strauss Institute](#)
- Fun introduction video explaining the history of voting
- Interactive discussion about what issues matter to students
- Hands-on Mock election activity
- Voter registration (UT Votes members are deputized to accept voter registration cards. Students who are not yet eligible or ineligible will be given a sample card to practice on).
- All students receive free civic participation buttons

I see this as a great way to equip high school students with the necessary skills to navigate voter registration and voting. We'd be honored to come and share this material with your students. We're available through May 8.

Thank you for your time,

<Name>

<Officer Position>

Teacher Information Form

The following questions were included on our Google form which was sent out to teachers in order to easily collect information on classes and what technology would be available to us.

The screenshot shows a Google Form with the following content:

Annette Strauss/Rock the Vote Democracy Class

Thank you for your interest in the Annette Strauss Institute/Rock the Vote's "Democracy Class," taught by UT Votes members. We are honored to come and get young adults excited to register to vote and be involved in civic life!

The lesson should take no longer than 45 minutes.

In order for us to plan accordingly, please fill out the form below to the best of your ability. We will contact you as soon as possible to move forward with picking a date to come teach Democracy Class in your classroom.

*** Required**

Name *

Email *

Phone number

High School

What class would you like Democracy Class taught in?

How many students are in this class?

Please pick the day(s) of the week of the class you would like Democracy Class to be taught in.

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday

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- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Depends on the week (A/B schedule)

What time is the class?

Our UT Votes members are full-time college students themselves - the more information we have on the day/time of your class, the quicker we can coordinate which UT Votes members are able to teach the class!

Our lesson plan includes the use of some technology. Please check what is available in your classroom.

No worries if you don't have all of these! We do have back-ups for classrooms without tech.

- Whiteboard or chalkboard
- Computer with ability to load a video and project on a screen
- Computer with projection from above includes sound
- Wi-Fi

Would you allow us to bring a video camera into the classroom to record our UT Votes members teaching?

We can exclude your students from being recorded in any way.

- Yes
- No

Do you have any additional important information we should know or questions for us?

Evaluation Form

Below is an evaluation form, adapted from Rock the Vote's survey, used to determine the effectiveness of the class and document how much students were registered.

Democracy Class – Evaluation Form

For High School Educators: On a scale of 1-5, where (5) is “Strongly Agree,” and (1) is “Strongly Disagree,” please answer the following:

Name: _____ School: _____

1. My students were engaged with and interested in the lesson.

5 4 3 2 1

2. I feel my students are more likely to vote.

5 4 3 2 1

3. I would participate in this lesson or future lessons taught by the Annette Strauss Institute.

5 4 3 2 1

4. I would recommend this program to other educators.

5 4 3 2 1

For Annette Strauss Institute leaders:

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. In how many class periods did you teach Democracy Class?
2. How many students participated in Democracy Class?
3. How many students registered to vote?