



WHY NON-PARTISAN CANDIDATE GUIDES MATTER AND HOW TO USE THEM TO HELP STUDENTS VOTE

When students don't vote, it's often because they feel they don't know where the candidates stand, and because they mistrust politics in general. The national nonpartisan [Campus Election Engagement Project](#) (CEEP) was created to help colleges and universities involve their students in elections. When CEEP founder Paul Loeb was speaking a couple years ago at Minnesota's Winona State, he asked students in a classroom point blank why they didn't vote. "I don't know enough," one woman said. "All the ads, all the lies, you can't believe what the candidates say, and I don't want to vote for the wrong person," something I hear again and again. "If I only had a list where I could see what they actually stood for..."

"Well actually," Loeb said, "we're creating lists exactly like that." He described the [nonpartisan candidate guides](#) that CEEP has been creating and distributing since 2012, as part of our overall effort to register students, help them reflect on issues, and get them to turn out at the polls. The student and her peers said lists like these could make all the difference to them in whether or not they vote.

Two days later, Loeb spoke at Viterbo, a Catholic university in La Crosse Wisconsin. Again he asked why students do and don't vote. "Students don't vote," said one, "because it takes a lot of effort to find out what the candidates stand for." Another then said, "It really helped last year when there was a printed list in everyone's mailbox and you could go down the list and see where the candidates stood on the issues." The other students enthusiastically agreed.

The professor coordinating the visit said they were CEEP's nonpartisan guides to the Presidential and Wisconsin Senate races from the previous year. After schools asked for a concise way to help students reflect on different candidates, we'd created the guides from candidate statements and stands, which we cross-checked with major media coverage. The Viterbo administrators liked our guides so much, they printed several thousand copies and distributed them to all the student mailboxes on campus.

Our guides have continued to get similarly terrific responses. When we surveyed the schools we worked with in 2014 and 2016, their average rating was just under 9 points on a 10-point scale. We're particularly proud to have a lead researcher who spent 19 years as a senior editor and manager at Encyclopedia Britannica, and who works in tandem with the former Associate Director of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. So we feel confident that they're a strong and useful tool to help students and other citizens past the reflex response of "they're all the same. They're all just lying and spinning."

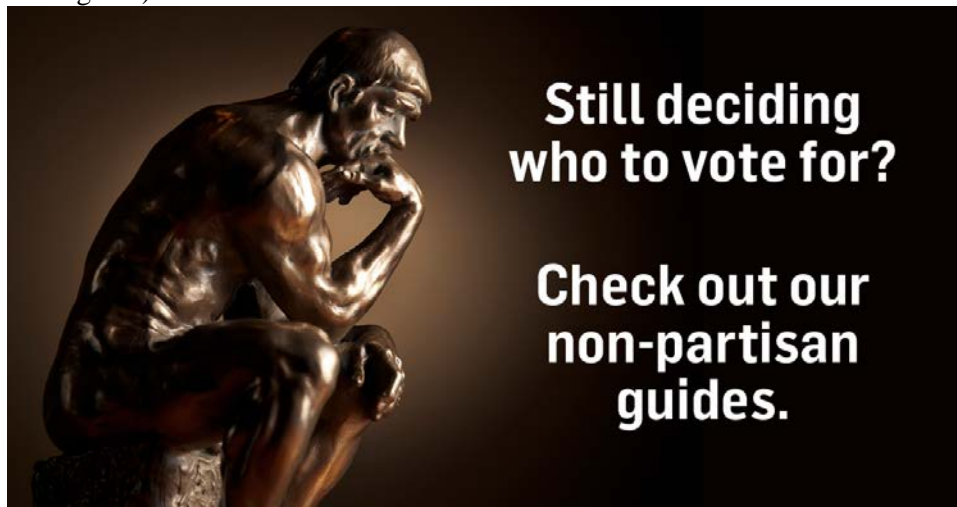
Here are some ways to distribute our guides—or any others you feel that are useful, like the guides the League of Women Voters creates for local candidates and statewide initiatives:

- Encourage your student newspaper to use them as a starting point for their election coverage. As discussed in our guide [for how student newspapers can help engage their campuses](#), campus papers can

do a huge amount to thoughtfully cover candidates beyond just following the horse race, or covering campus visits. We'd be delighted if they printed our guides as an insert or elaborated on their themes. Various schools have done both, and the earlier you get the guides to the student paper, the more likely they'll be able to use them to galvanize student engagement.

- Distribute printed copies of the guides in students' physical mailboxes, as Viterbo did. Or have student volunteers hand them out as part of your nonpartisan voter engagement effort. Make them a starting-point for campus conversations.
- Post them prominently on your school's election-related website. You can then link to them through other electronic outreach.
- Distribute them through all-campus email and social media outlets. Millennials love to spread ideas online, so distribute a link to the guides via social media networks and text-blasts. We've included a sample meme below that you can use on Social Media with a link to the guides. If you can track views and let us know, we'd appreciate it.
- Use them to help spark discussions in classrooms and residence halls. The goal is not to get agreement. It's to get students weighing in and talking about how their own values and political stands relate to those of the candidates.
- Think big: Blow the guides up in posters large enough to be visible to passing students. Display in high-traffic areas of the student union, classroom buildings, or residence halls. It's an inexpensive way to get major visibility.
- Create your own nonpartisan guides to down-ballot races, like Secretary of State, Attorney General, Congressional and local legislative races, and local and statewide initiatives. Have students draw up these guides under the supervision of political science, communications, or honors faculty, or have the faculty create them. Distribute them in the campus, community, and online as you would the CEEP guides.
- If your local League of Women Voters is creating guides to national, state, or local election, or any other nonpartisan groups, promote and distribute them as well. Direct students to some of the websites we use to put them together, like Votemart.org, Vote411.org, OntheIssues.org, FactCheck.org, Politifact.com,
- Add your own creative ideas, and let CEEP know so we can pass them on. Use the guides to create reflection however you can.

[Here's a sample meme you can use to link to the guides (currently linked to our general guides page, but feel free to link to any specific guide).



One more note on the guides: Particularly when we do guides for down-ballot races, there are some categories which we've marked Answer Unknown, Unclear, or No Response Found. These are areas where we simply couldn't find an answer for one of the candidates, sometimes because one candidate had the chance to vote on a particular issue and the other didn't. But you can still be proactive and ask candidates yourselves on their stands, ask your campus newspaper to do so, or look for additional coverage. And if you do get an answer for a guide we've created, please let your state CEEP staffer know, so they can update the guides for other schools in your state.