

PRESS RELEASE



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VANIER COLLEGE

821 Ste-Croix, St-Laurent QC H4L 3X9 Tel: 514.744.7500 Fax: 514.744.7505 info@vaniercollege.qc.ca www.vaniercollege.qc.ca

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How to get young people to vote? A study at Vanier College looks for answers.

It's an unfortunate fact that over the past two decades, voting turnout has declined steadily in most advanced democratic countries, including Canada, mostly because young people reaching voting age do not bother to vote. A study conducted during the recent 2007 Québec Elections, by Henry Milner, Research Fellow in Electoral Studies at the University of Montreal and graduate students Peter Lowen and Bruce Hicks, looked at factors that may be related to this phenomenon. Professor Milner will present the results of his study on Wednesday May 2 at Vanier College, in the Amphitheatre, Room B223, at 12 Noon.

Compulsory Voting and Informed Youth: A semi-natural Experiment, focused on students from Vanier College who were potential first-time voters, and looked at what might induce them not only to vote but also to seek out information and make that vote an informed one. Over 140 students completed the study.

In order to determine whether the intention to vote influenced the degree of attentiveness to the electoral process and interest in political issues, the students responded to two questionnaires. The first was filled out when the campaign began and the second one in the days immediately preceding the election. This allowed the researchers to measure what the students learned about issues relevant to Quebec politics as the election drew near. The students were paid \$25.00 for participating, but half only received the money if they also voted.

Not only do fewer young people vote, but they are also less politically knowledgeable and less interested in public affairs than those of a generation ago. The question posed is what can be done about it. In Australia, people pay a fine if they fail to vote – unless they have a very good reason. The authors wanted to know if, to avoid losing \$25.00, young people would not only vote but also seek out information and become better informed about politics and campaign issues.

“What’s striking is the degree of disinterest and the lack of information among young people,” states Dr. Milner.

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For information please contact:
Marguerite Corriveau, Vanier Communications Officer
Telephone: (514) 744-7500, ext. 7596
Email: marguerite.corriveau@vaniercollege.qc.ca