



ALBERTA

Voters: 2.3 million
PSE Students: 180,929
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 58% (2012)
Students cannot choose
ordinary residence

Like most jurisdictions Alberta highlights post-secondary students inside our Elections Act. However, ours focuses on limiting a student's options and access to voting on polling day. Our law specifically states that a student that is temporarily living away from family members for study, in fact, lives with those family members for the purposes of the act and thus should vote in that constituency.

The Alberta Elections Act states:

As Subject to section 121, for the purposes of this Act, ordinary residence is determined in accordance with the following rules...

(c) a student who

(i) is in attendance at an educational institution within or outside Alberta,

(ii) temporarily rents accommodation for the purpose of attending an educational institution, and

(iii) has family members who are ordinarily resident in Alberta and with whom the student ordinarily resides when not in attendance at an educational institution

is deemed to reside with those family members.

Going to the polling station your neighbours go to following a day on campus and being told you need to vote where your parents live rather than where you have lived for the past eight months when polls close in three hours is tantamount to

disenfranchisement, an experience many students saw on April 23, 2012. Kelsey, a student from the University of Calgary shares her story of calling Elections Alberta:

I told them I was a student living in Calgary, but that I had lived here for almost two years without leaving, and I had a permanent address here. I asked if I brought my lease, and my utilities bill would that be acceptable, and she replied no, that I wasn't eligible to vote in Calgary because I was a student. She told me I was eligible to vote at home. I had looked up online if I was eligible and their website said I was, but from the information I received via telephone I decided that it wasn't worth me going in and hearing the same thing from someone else.

Offering choice to post-secondary students on ordinary residency is the easiest and most direct way to amend Alberta's legislation. It modernizes the language to better reflect the reality of today's post-secondary students - for students who rarely return to their family's home to live following their studies, even if while studying they are "temporarily renting", the reality is that they have in fact left home and by offering choice in the legislation it will be clear to all parties involved - to candidates, Elections Alberta, and especially to students looking to cast their ballot - that the place where a student calls their home is really best left up to the student themselves and we want them to cast a ballot in that place.

As you can see, Alberta would not be alone in offering choice to post-secondary students, in fact every province other than Newfoundland and Labrador allows post-secondary students the opportunity to vote where they are studying and in every case it has presented no problems to the integrity of the vote. Indeed, as Alberta struggles with making our voter turnout higher, especially among younger Albertans, ensuring our elections are as accessible as possible needs to be a major priority for any revisions to our Elections Act.

UPDATING THE ALBERTA ELECTIONS ACT



BRITISH COLUMBIA

*Voters: 2.9 million
PSE Students: 260,046
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 59% (2009)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*

British Columbia presents perhaps the best opportunities for post-secondary students to participate in the electoral process and in removing barriers to getting the ballot box during an election. In addition to allowing clear choice to the student for ordinary residency BC also offers anywhere voting at any returning office as well as embracing a clear mandate of encouraging increased voter turnout among young British Columbians.

The British Columbia Elections Act states:

If for the purposes of attending an educational institution an individual establishes a new place where the individual is a resident that is away from the usual place where the individual is a resident, the individual may choose for the purposes of this Act either the usual place or the new place as the place where the individual is a resident.

Elections BC's activities have extended well beyond just the mechanical workings of elections as well. Through programs such as Student Vote and partnerships with groups like Apathy is Boring Elections BC and their new Chief Electoral Officer, former University of Calgary professor Dr. Keith Archer have aggressively targeted youth voter turnout and removing barriers as a key to improving their democracy and has always been held as a model by CAUS for Alberta to follow in making our elections more accessible for post-secondary students.



SASKATCHEWAN

*Voters: 603,142
PSE Students: 52,611
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 66% (2011)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*

Saskatchewan was among the first province's to offer students a choice of voting where their family lives or in the community where they study, and continues to make it clear that the choice is up to the student.

The Saskatchewan Elections Act states:

If an individual has left his or her place of residence in Saskatchewan to study at an educational institution in Saskatchewan, the individual is deemed to be ordinarily resident in the two following places:

(a) in the polling division in which he or she was residing immediately before leaving to pursue his or her studies, and the individual is deemed to continue to have that ordinary residence until he or she completes or abandons his or her studies;

(b) in the polling division to which he or she has moved for the purpose of pursuing his or her studies and in which he or she was residing on the day on which the writ was issued.

Saskatchewan also sees many students leave the province to study and takes great strides to ensure that those students are able to vote in provincial elections provided that they have maintained residency. Applications to vote through an absentee ballot are able to be obtained either through a toll-free call or through an online process.

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MANITOBA

*Voters: 777,054
PSE Students: 54,963
No fixed dates
Voter turnout: 56% (2011)
Students can vote in the riding they are studying in*

Manitoba is unique among Canada's provinces in that while it allows students to vote in the community that they are studying in, it does not permit them to vote in the community they lived in prior to attending university or college if their program is longer than six months, thus not allowing the student to choose what constitutes their ordinary residence.

The Manitoba Elections Act states:

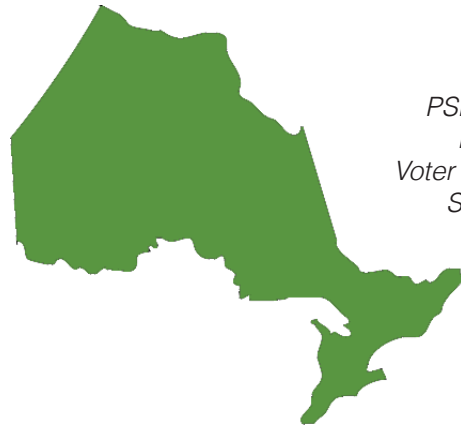
If a Manitoba resident temporarily resides in a place in Manitoba to allow him or her to

(a) attend an educational institution for a course of instruction of six months or longer; or

(b) pursue his or her ordinary occupation in a situation that is expected to last for six months or longer;

that temporary residence is deemed to be his or her residence from the date the person begins to reside there.

This is not a preferable option, because although it would avoid some of the problems we saw in Alberta's recent provincial election, we have heard from many students that they wanted to vote where their families live and where they felt they had the strongest ties to. This is why choice is so important and why we are asking for an amendment to Alberta's Elections Act in line with what most jurisdictions have which put the decision in the hands of the voter.



ONTARIO

*Voters: 8.5 million
PSE Students: 745,455
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 49% (2011)
Students can choose ordinary residence*

Election Ontario's mission statement is to "make voting easy, and that means putting the needs of the elector first," which includes making sure Ontario post-secondary students are able to either vote where their residence is or where they are temporarily living during the school year while they attend a post-secondary institution.

The Ontario Elections Act states:

A person who is temporarily living away from his or her residence in order to attend a university, college of applied arts and technology or other post-secondary institution is entitled to vote,

(a) in the electoral district where he or she is temporarily living; or

(b) in the electoral district where his or her residence is located.

Elections Ontario also places a premium on reaching out to other groups in order to improve their performance. Working between elections with groups like the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance and the College Student Alliance, Elections Ontario has been working hard to improve voter turnout.

They have also been working hard with the Ontario Ministry of Education to improve outreach with students in grades five and twelve to ensure that future voters are made aware of their rights and responsibilities before they reach the voting age.

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QUEBEC

*Voters: 5.8 million
PSE Students: 487,482
No fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 56% (2008)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*



NEW BRUNSWICK

*Voters: 520,909
PSE Students: 31,428
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 72% (2010)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*

Through the program *Jeunes Electeurs* Elections Québec actively seeks to increase voter turnout and education of new voters in the province through outreach via students' unions and associations. This program helps the associations develop best practices in regards to their own internal elections as well as ensures superb communications between post-secondary students and Elections Québec during a general election.

Québec also offers post-secondary students a clear choice when determining ordinary residence during a general election

The Québec Elections Act states:

Un électeur qui quitte temporairement son domicile pour travailler ou étudier dans un autre secteur électoral peut être considéré comme domicilié soit dans la section de vote où se trouve son domicile, soit dans celle où il réside aux fins de son travail ou de ses études.

(An elector who temporarily leaves his domicile to work or to study in another electoral precinct may be considered to be domiciled either in the polling subdivision of his domicile or in that where he resides for the purposes of his work or studies.)

New Brunswick's Elections Act does not single out post-secondary students for specific attention, merely stating that your ordinary residence is where you sleep and where you intend to return after you leave. Elections New Brunswick is clear however when interpreting the act when offering the choice to post-secondary students on where to vote.

Elections New Brunswick offers the following interpretation to post-secondary students:

Eligible electors at a Community College or University in the province but outside their "home" region can choose to vote in the election in either the district where they ordinarily live or the district in which they live while attending college or university.

Certainly CAUS has long advocated that the best solution would come through a direct and clear amendment in Alberta's Elections Act but we can see in New Brunswick's case that by removing post-secondary students from the act but by offering students the choice through interpretation the barriers to voting are still removed and students are offered the choice on voting day on where to cast their ballot.

More open interpretation of the legislation is an avenue that would be open in Alberta only after removing our very restrictive language that exists specifically in regards to post-secondary students, but certainly mirroring provinces like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and others where student choice is clear would be preferable.



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

*Voters: 97,606
PSE Students: 8,022
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 76% (2011)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*



NOVA SCOTIA

*Voters: 691,090
PSE Students: 52,074
No fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 59% (2009)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*

Canada's smallest province makes it fairly straightforward for their post-secondary students when it comes to offering a choice on voting day for their ordinary residence.

The Prince Edward Island Elections Act states:

Where a person is a student at a recognized educational institution within the province and has a family in the province, the student is ordinarily a resident, at the option of the student,

(a) in the polling division where the student's family home is located; or

(b) in the polling division where the student is living while attending the recognized educational institution.

Perhaps because Prince Edward Island is so small, with even smaller electoral districts - the average number of votes cast in a PEI riding in 2011 was only 2,762 - it is a province where every vote can count and ensuring that the process is both fair and accessible is important. Ensuring that students are able to vote is crucial, but as well making sure that their votes are counted in their community is vital to maintaining the integrity of the whole vote.

With that in mind, the practice of allowing students to choose their residency has never been contentious and has contributed to Prince Edward Island's high voter turnout.

Nova Scotia is home to many post-secondary students - per capita it has the largest post-secondary students in Canada and as a result Elections Nova Scotia places a high degree of importance of focusing on the university and college students of the province and making sure they understand their rights in provincial elections.

The Nova Scotia Elections Act states:

A person who, on the date of the writ,

(a) is registered and in attendance at an educational institution;

(b) resides in an electoral district or polling division other than that of the person's family home; and

(c) is qualified as an elector,

may be included on the list of electors in one or the other of the polling divisions, but not both.

Elections Nova Scotia strongly encourages students to contact their local Returning Officer if they wish to be included in the polling division of their "school home" and works closely with the students' unions, residences, and universities to ensure that they are on the appropriate list of electors come polling day.

The logistical details requires teamwork between institutions and Elections Nova Scotia, and of course resources, but works well for a province that is home to tens of thousands of Canada's university and college students.

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NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR



*Voters: 428,542
PSE Students: 27,964
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 52% (2011)
Students must vote in
previous riding*

Newfoundland and Labrador is the province most similar in law to Alberta in that it does not offer choice to post-secondary students when it comes to offering choice in determining ordinary residency. It is not related however to a “family home” or any paternalistic notion but rather simply the residency prior to study.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Elections Act states:

Notwithstanding Rule IV, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, a person who has left his or her place of residence in the province to pursue a course of study at an educational institution either outside or within the province is considered to be ordinarily resident in the place where he or she was residing immediately before leaving to pursue the course of study, and he or she is considered to continue to have that ordinary residence until he or she completes or abandons the course of study.

Regardless of age or family situation, a student in Newfoundland and Labrador would have to vote where they lived prior to enrolment.

This likely functionally disenfranchises many in Newfoundland and Labrador, as our Elections Act does here in Alberta. Student groups in Newfoundland and Labrador have been advocating to amend election laws in that province as well to modernize their election practices to better reflect what students need.

CANADA



*Voters: 23,974,890
PSE Students: 1,905,059
Fixed election dates
Voter turnout: 61% (2011)
Students can choose
ordinary residence*

Our federal Elections Act does not single out post-secondary students out for any specific or special treatment regarding their ordinary residency, relying on a definition of ordinary residency that mirrors that found in every province.

The Canada Elections Act states:

The place of ordinary residence of a person is the place that has always been, or that has been adopted as, his or her dwelling place, and to which the person intends to return when away from it.

In practice students are able to choose when they get to the polls if the residence they are in at school is their ordinary residence or simply a temporary residence. Regardless of their choice, they do still have to provide identification to verify their identity and their address or swear an oath in order to get on the voter's list in their riding and obtain a ballot.

Elections Canada also engages in tremendous outreach with university, college, and technical school campuses across Canada to ensure that post-secondary students are informed in advance of votes. This includes campus visits by Elections Canada staff, information packets sent to student associations, and of course polling stations on campuses for advance polls and on voting days. These polling stations of course make a lot more sense when students can choose to declare their ordinary residency in the riding where they live in the in-study period - something which CAUS sees as a necessity in Alberta.

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WHO IS CAUS

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents over 70,000 university students across Alberta. We represent undergraduate students from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge to the public, government and other post-secondary education stakeholders.

Based in Edmonton, CAUS is a non-partisan and active advocacy group looking to ensure an accessible and quality post-secondary education system in Alberta. CAUS is committed to:

- Representing, promoting and defending common interests of Alberta university students;
- Seeking a fully accessible, high quality system of education in Alberta;
- Promoting and supporting the provision of effective student services;
- Providing a forum for the exchange of information among Alberta post-secondary students;
- Representing Alberta university students to all levels of government with a united voice; and
- Promoting the importance of an accessible education system.

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