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TO: Linda Lamone, Ross Goldstein, and Nikki Trella, Maryland State Board of Elections
FROM: Paul Herrnson and Michael Hanmer, Center for American Politics and Citizenship
DATE: March 31, 2011
RE: Report on survey results among UM student voters regarding early, absentee, and electronic voting

Beginning with the 2010 primary election, the State of Maryland offered its voters the option of receiving their official blank absentee ballot, accompanying documentation, and pre-addressed mailing label via a secure website. This new voting option, known as the Electronic Absentee Ballot Delivery System (EABDS), was developed by the Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC), under contract with the Maryland State Board of Elections. Also beginning with the 2010 elections, Maryland voters were allowed to vote before the election at an early voting center in their county of residence. Each county designated at least one location where voters were able to cast their ballot up to eleven days prior to the election. As part of a larger evaluation process, CAPC conducted several surveys to examine these new methods of voting. This memo summarizes the results from CAPC's survey of University of Maryland (UM) students who were registered to vote in Maryland, with a focus on those who reported voting. We examine the voting experiences of the Maryland undergraduate and graduate students who used EABDS and early voting in comparison to those who voted using traditional in-person voting or paper-based absentee voting, as well as to all other non-UM EABDS users. Overall, the students were pleased with their voting experiences and EABDS in particular.

The research population consisted of 31,866 individuals who were U.S. citizens enrolled at UM. Each of these 31,866 individuals was sent an email after the November 2010 general election inviting them to participate in a survey to help researchers understand and improve how the state conducts elections. Those who did not respond were sent up to five additional email reminders. A total of 10,422 individuals took the survey, yielding a response rate of about 33%. For the purposes of this memo, the analysis is based on the 4,675 responses from students registered to vote in the State of Maryland.

Once voters cast their ballots they turn their trust over to those who handle them. When asked how confident they were that their ballots were counted as intended, the vast majority of UM student voters said they were either somewhat confident or very confident (see Figure 1). The percentage who were at least somewhat confident ranged from 85%, among students who voted absentee and received their ballot via regular mail (regular absentee voting), to 99% among students who voted early. UM students who used EABDS were slightly more confident than EABDS users who are not currently enrolled at UM, though both sets of voters expressed high levels of confidence.

UM students were also extremely satisfied with their overall voting experience. Figure 2 demonstrates that those who voted early were the most satisfied with having voted that way (95%), followed by those who voted on Election Day (92%), those who used EABDS (89%), and those who used regular absentee voting (82%).

Figure 1. How Confident Are You that Your Ballot Was Counted as Intended?

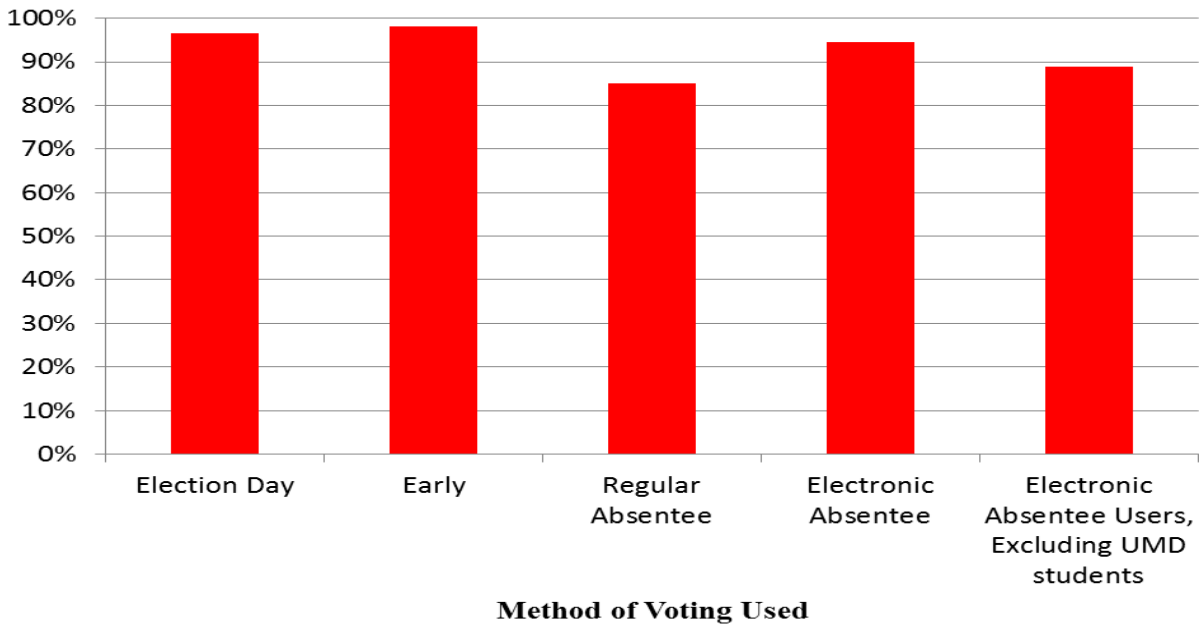
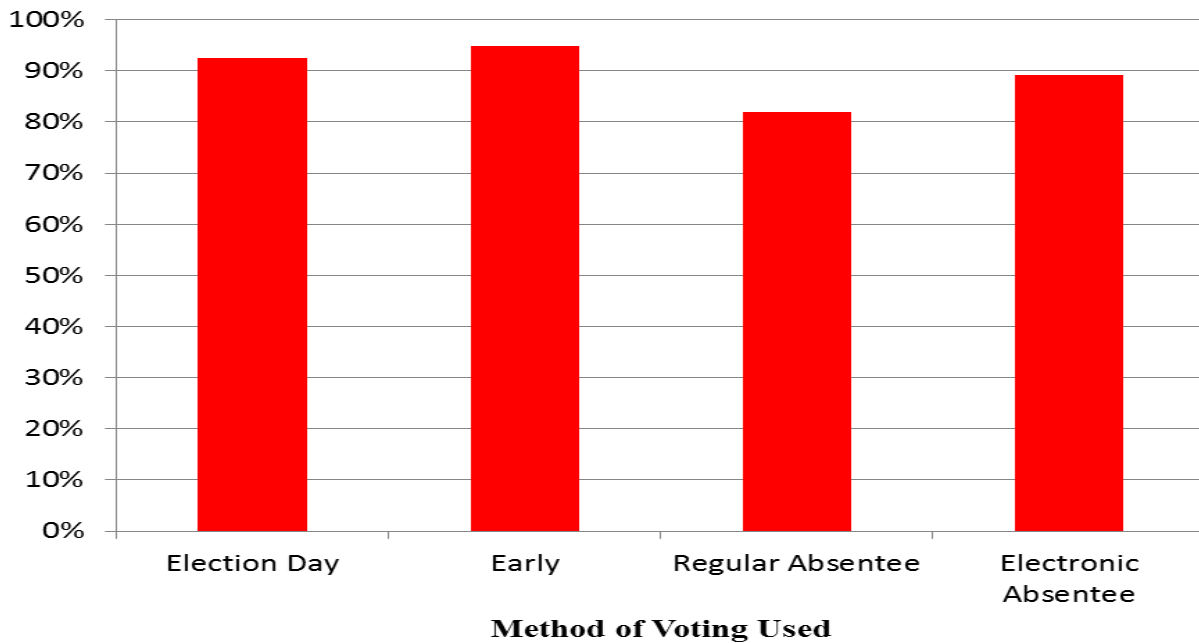


Figure 2. Satisfaction with Voting Method Used



When asked to compare voting methods based on which is the most convenient, Election Day voters, early voters, and EABDS voters selected those methods, respectively, as the most convenient (Figure 3). The percentage, however, of those who indicated that a method other than the one they used would be more convenient was often quite high. For example, among those who voted on Election Day, 37% said that EABDS would be the most convenient. Among students who used regular absentee voting, a majority (57%) said EABDS would be the most convenient, followed at a distance by regular absentee voting (23%); to the extent that convenience determines how these students will vote in the future, we might well expect a higher proportion of these voters to use EABDS. Across each voting method, EABDS never ranked worse than second in terms of the percentage who said it would be the most convenient.

When asked to rate each voting method in terms of security, the method of voting actually used played a much smaller role. As Figure 4 shows, a majority of students across each category cited voting on Election Day as the most secure method of voting. Only for early voters did the percentage citing Election Day drop below 78%. The next largest percentage of students said early voting would offer the most security, followed by EABDS and regular absentee voting.

Figure 3. Which Method of Voting Would Be the Most Convenient?

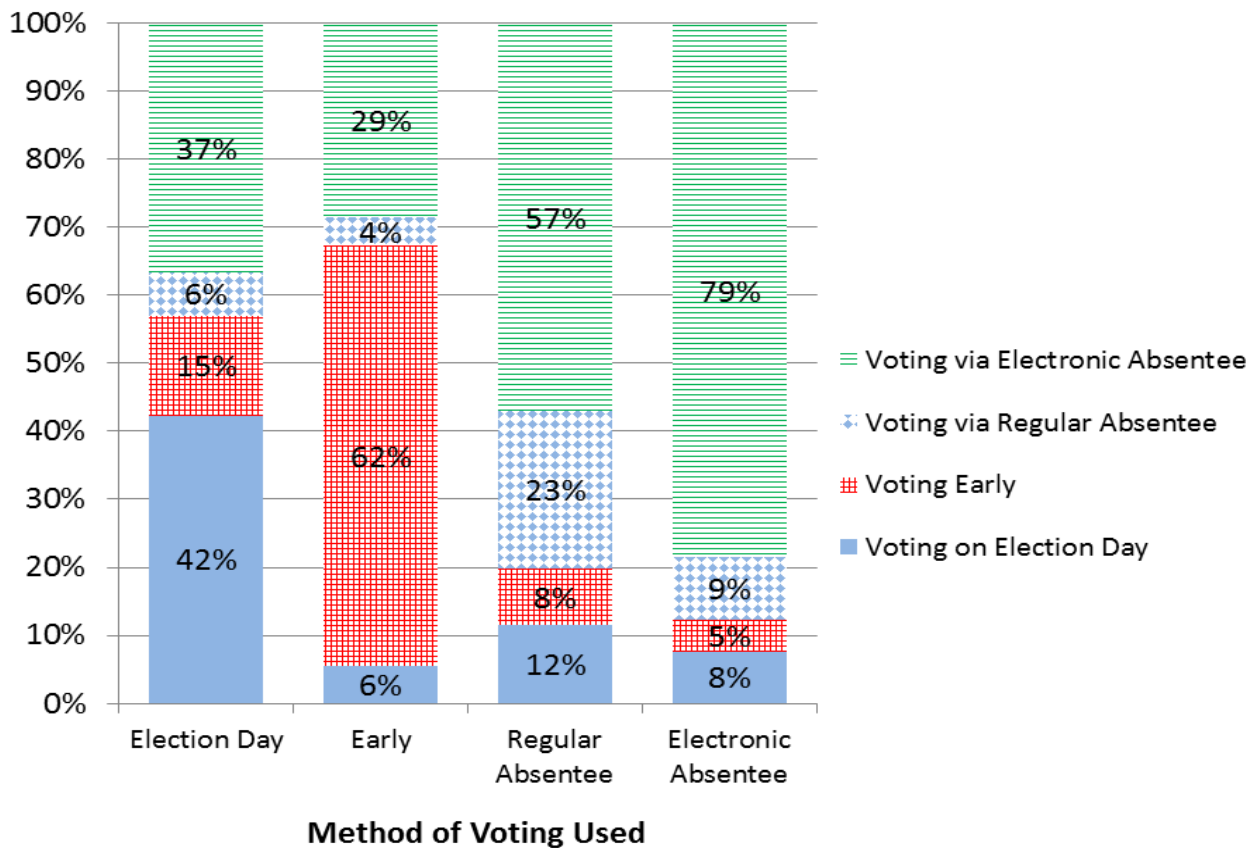
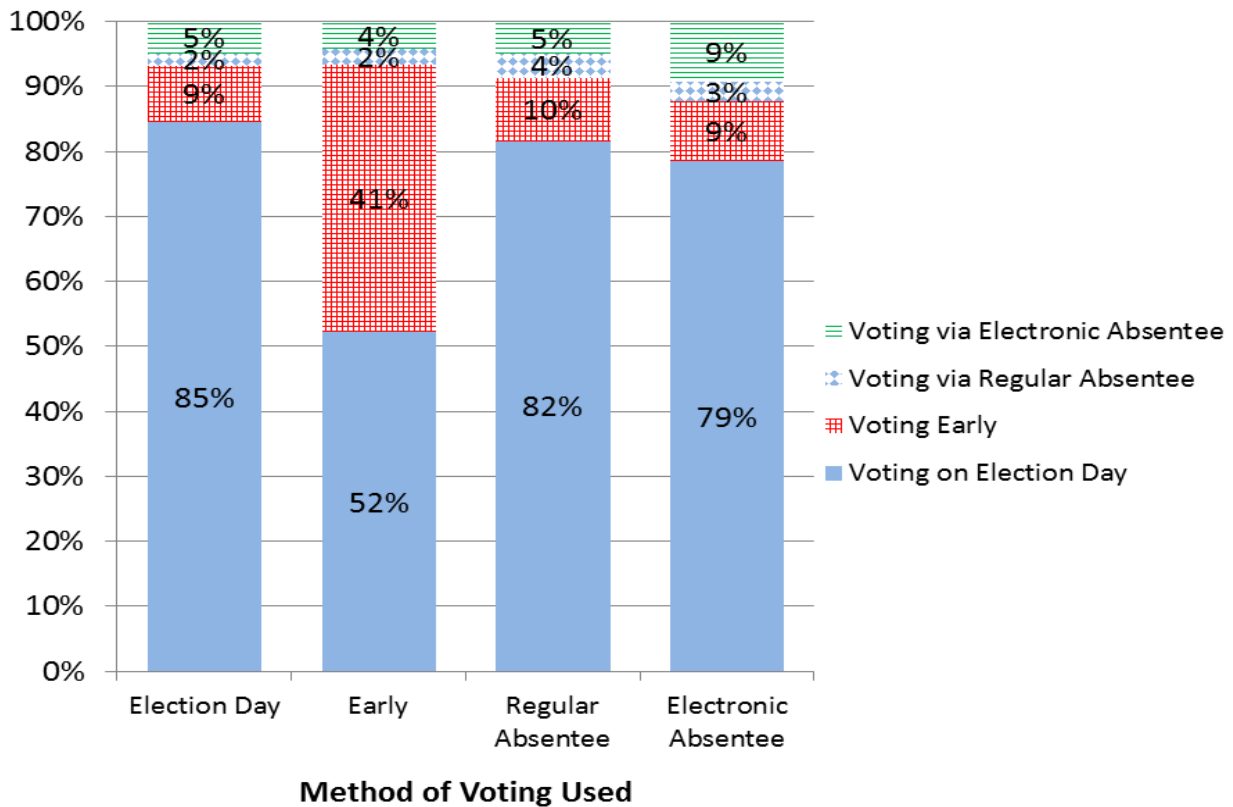


Figure 4. Which Method of Voting Would Be the Most Secure?



We also asked respondents questions focused on absentee voting. Looking to the future, students who voted absentee in 2010 were highly likely to report that they would use EABDS in future elections (see Figure 5). Among student EABDS users, 96% said they were somewhat or very likely to use EABDS, a slightly higher percentage than among non-student EABDS users. Nearly all of those who voted by regular absentee voting also said they would be at least somewhat likely to use EABDS (89%). But, among Election Day and early voters, the rate of expected future usage of EABDS was much lower – around 50%.

Table 1 reveals that, on ease of obtaining the ballot, following the instructions, and whether one encountered any obstacles, students who used regular absentee voting were indistinguishable from those who used EABDS. Almost all absentee voters found it easy to obtain an absentee ballot and follow the instructions. Also, in each case 17% who voted absentee or tried to do so reported facing some sort of obstacle with completing and returning the ballot.

We asked students to elaborate on the obstacles they faced when voting or trying to vote via absentee ballot. Table 2 reports on the obstacles encountered by students who requested a regular absentee ballot and those who requested a ballot via EABDS. The frequency of problems encountered differs considerably across the two approaches to receiving an absentee ballot. Among those requesting a regular absentee ballot, mail problems (54%), followed by personal

reasons (21%) accounted for the bulk of the obstacles. For those trying to use EABDS, problems with the envelope (33%), mail problems (21%), and not receiving the ballot (18%) were the most cited obstacles. While the envelope was barely an issue for the students who requested a regular absentee ballot this was the most frequently cited obstacle among those who requested a ballot through EABDS, suggesting that those who preferred the more technologically sophisticated method of voting were more troubled by the need to purchase an envelope than others. Also of note is that none of the students who used or tried to use EABDS claimed that the ballot did not arrive on time, while 3% of students who requested a regular absentee ballot cited this as an obstacle. However, a larger portion of students requesting a ballot via EABDS claimed the ballot did not arrive.

Figure 5. How Likely Are You to Use EABDS in Future Elections?

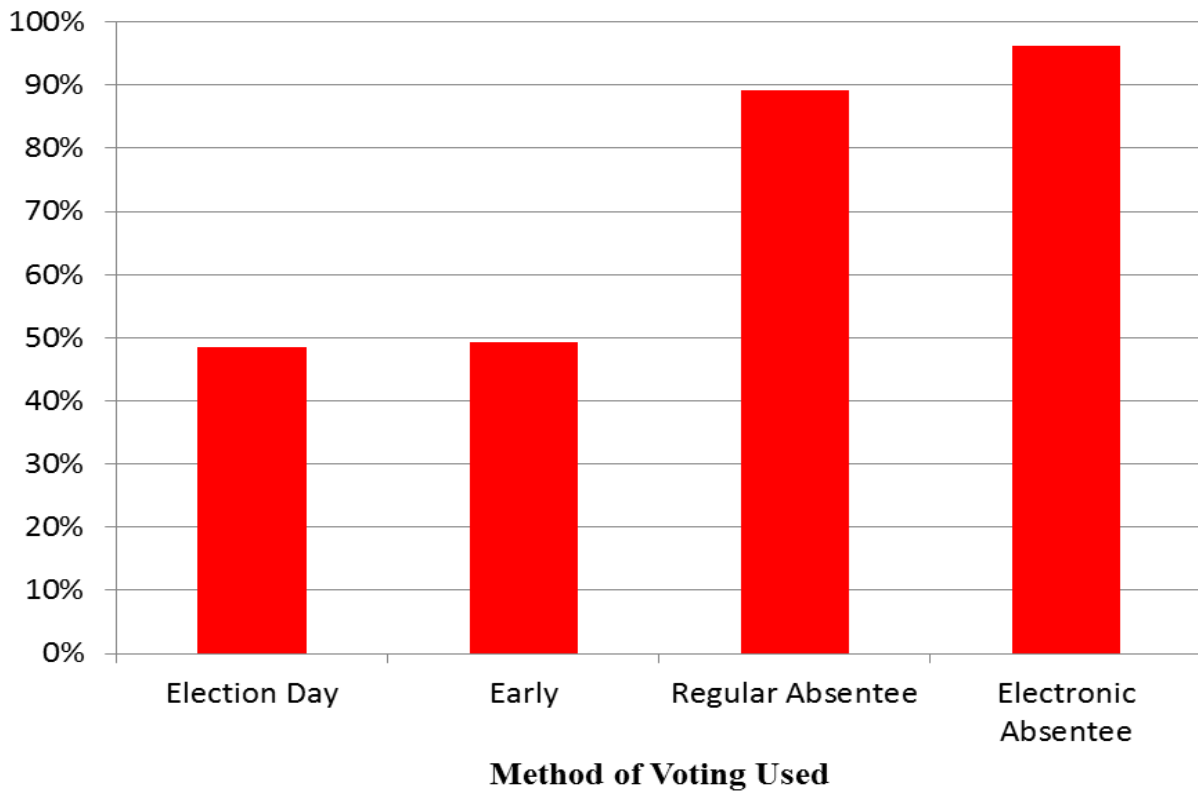


Table 1. Ease of Use and Obstacles by Absentee Voting Method

Method of Voting	Ease of Obtaining the Ballot	Ease of Following the Instructions	Faced Obstacles Completing and Returning Ballot
Regular Absentee	95%	95%	17%
Electronic Absentee	96%	98%	17%

Table 2. Obstacles Encountered by Students Who Requested an Absentee Ballot, by Method of Request

Obstacle	Regular Absentee	Electronic Absentee
Personal reasons (e.g. forgot, got too busy)	21%	6%
Mail problems - (e.g. did not have stamps, not used to using mail)	54%	21%
Individual missed one of the deadlines	3%	3%
Ballot not received	8%	18%
Difficulty with instructions	8%	9%
Problems with the envelope (e.g. printing, size, didn't have one)	2%	33%
Expected more electronic capabilities	2%	3%
Ballot not received on time	3%	0%
Electronic problems (e.g. link not working)	0%	6%

Similar to the questions on absentee voting, we asked students about their experiences with Maryland's new early voting option. Students were generally able to vote early without much difficulty. When asked how easy it was to vote early 92% said it was either fairly or very easy to do so. Since we anticipated that getting to the early voting location might be a challenge for students, we asked how easy it was to find the location, with 93% saying it was either fairly or very easy. Overall, among those who voted early or tried to do so, 17% said that they faced obstacles along the way. Table 3 shows the percentage of each type of obstacle students reported they faced. As was the case with students who voted or tried to vote absentee, a high percentage of those voting or trying to vote early cited personal reasons (39%). The next most frequent obstacles cited had to do with the voting times that were inconvenient for the students, long lines, or a lack of information on the dates, times, or locations for early voting. Among those citing obstacles, only 24% ended up voting early.

Table 3. Obstacles Encountered by Students Who Voted Early or Tried to Vote Early

Obstacle	%
Personal reasons (e.g. forgot, got too busy)	39%
Inconvenient voting times	18%
Long lines to (park or vote)	16%
Lack of information on date, time, or location	16%
Inconvenient location	10%

Overall, UM student voters were confident that their votes would be recorded as intended, satisfied with the voting process, including those using the new EABDS and early voting methods. They also reported being highly likely to use EABDS in the future, especially if they voted via regular absentee or EABDS in 2010. Some did face obstacles, which suggests there is room for improvement, but by their own admission, much of the responsibility rested with themselves rather than the electoral system.