



# Improving Elections with Instant Runoff Voting

***Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)*** - Used for both government, college and private elections throughout the United States and the world, *instant runoff voting* is a simple election process used to avoid the expense, difficulties and shortcomings of runoff elections. Compared to the traditional "delayed" runoff, IRV saves taxpayers money, cuts the costs of running campaigns, elects public officials with higher voter turnout and encourages candidates to run less negative campaigns.

## How instant runoff voting works:

- **First round of counting:** The **voters rank their preferred candidate first and may also rank additional choices (second, third, etc.)**. In the first round of counting, the voters' #1 choices are tallied. A candidate who receives enough first choices to win outright (typically a majority) is declared the winner. However, other candidates may have enough support to require a runoff – *just as in traditional runoff systems*.
- **Second round:** If no one has achieved a clear victory, **the runoff occurs instantly**. The candidate with the fewest votes is removed and the votes made for that candidate are redistributed using voters' second choices. Other voters' top choices remain the same. The redistributed votes are added to the counts of the candidates still in competition. The process is repeated until one candidate has majority support.

## The benefits:

Instant runoff voting (IRV) would do everything the current runoff system does to ensure that the winner has popular support – but it does it in one election rather than two.

- *Saves campus governments, students and candidates money* by holding only one election.
- *Ensures higher voter turnout* than when voters are asked to return for a second, runoff election.
- *Eases the administrative burden on election officers* who only have to run one election, not two.
- *Discourages negative campaigning* because victories may require candidates to be the second or third choices of other candidates' supporters.

## Where instant runoff voting is used:

- **Universities:** More than 40 colleges and universities use IRV for student elections, including Princeton, Wake Forest, William and Mary, Rice, University of Washington, Duke, UC Berkeley and UC Davis.
- **California:** San Francisco started running IRV with a successful election in November 2004. By using IRV, the City expects to save at least \$15 million over the coming decade.
- **Utah:** Since 2002, the Utah Republican Party has used IRV at its state conventions for nominating candidates for congressional and statewide offices.
- **Vermont:** In May 2005 Gov. Douglas (R) signed a bill to allow Burlington use IRV, as approved by city voters by a two-to-one margin. Their 2006 IRV mayoral election was a huge success.
- **Ireland:** Irish presidential elections are conducted using IRV.
- **Louisiana:** More than 10,000 overseas and out-of-state military voters received IRV ballots in 2004. The system has been a success. In 2005, Arkansas passed a similar law.
- **Businesses and Organizations:** Many groups and corporations use IRV to elect their board of directors.
- **Sports Awards:** Even the winners the Heisman Trophy are picked by a ranked voting system.



# Talking Points: Majority Rule, Without a Separate Election

Q: What is instant runoff voting?

*"Instant runoff voting (IRV) means **better elections**."*

- You rank candidates in the order you like them, so if your top choice doesn't win, your vote goes to your next choice, instead of being "wasted."
- If no one has a majority on the first count, the least-popular candidate is knocked off and those voters' next choice counts instead. This repeats until one candidate earns a majority.

Q: What's the problem with the way we do it now?

*"Right now our elections can't guarantee majority rule."*

- The more candidates run, the fewer votes you need to win. This means a small minority of voters can decide the election for everyone else.

*"Runoffs are a waste of time and money."*

- Runoffs are supposed to produce a candidate with a higher level of support. In practice, voter turnout dwindles when second elections are held, actually giving us a candidate elected by fewer people. Given the cost and effort of holding a runoff, we need a better way.

Q: How does it strengthen democracy?

*"It guarantees majority support without runoffs."*

- Every vote counts equally and no vote is "wasted" or "spoiled."

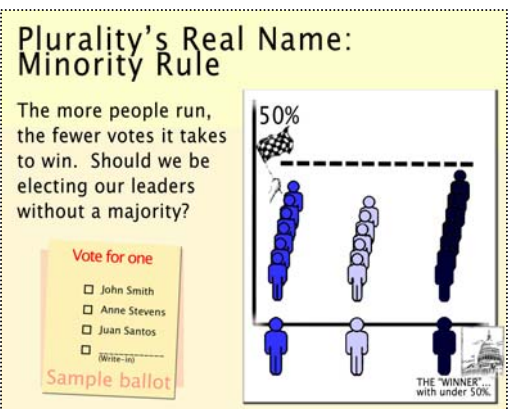
*"Everyone wins with instant runoff voting."*

- **Voters win.** You can vote for the candidate you really believe in, without worrying about throwing your vote away.
- **Taxpayers win.** IRV stops us from wasting money on expensive, ineffective runoffs.
- **Candidates win.** We will have less negative campaigning, since candidates want their opponents' voters to rank them #2.
- **America wins.** IRV restores faith in democracy by accommodating voter choice and inspiring better candidates to run for office.

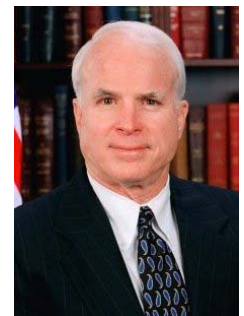
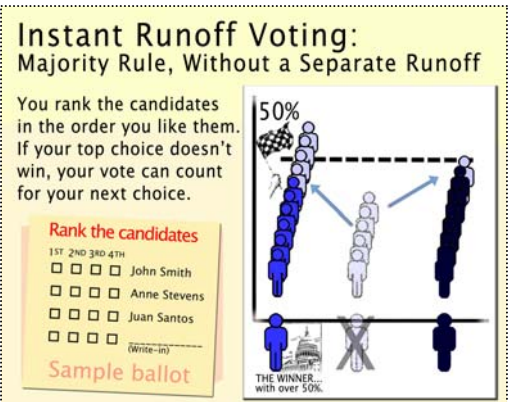
Q: Who supports IRV?

*"Leaders from across the political spectrum support it, from **John McCain** to **Barack Obama**."*

- Also, voters nationwide chose IRV. Cities like San Francisco CA, Burlington VT and Takoma Park, MD. Many countries and U.S. colleges use it as well!



VS.





## Important Election Terminology

A very important aspect of discussing election and voting reform is understanding the concepts used.

### Useful terms:

- **Plurality:** Simply put, the most votes. Many officials are elected by receiving a plurality, as long as they have more votes than anyone else. These elections are also called **"winner-take-all."**
- **Minority Rule:** In winner-take-all elections, candidates often have less than 50% support. Thus, a majority of voters would have actually preferred other candidates. In crowded elections winners may only represent a sliver of the electorate. Plurality elections allow a political minority to have a monopoly on power.
- **Runoff:** A round of elections, typically between two candidates that seeks to ensure majority support for one of the candidates. Usually the candidates are the two individuals who received the most votes during the first round of voting, but neither reached 50%.
- **The "Spoiler" Effect:** When two like-minded candidates split their base of support, allowing a less desired candidate to win the race. This can often take place in winner-take-all elections. A contemporary case would be the 2000 Florida race, when Ralph Nader drew enough votes from the political left to give Bush the margin of victory over Gore. IRV would use 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and subsequent choices to alleviate the problems caused by "vote-splitting" and "spoilers."
- **Ranked voting:** A system in which voters indicate their choices using ranks for candidates (i.e. first, second, third, etc.) There are a number of types of ranked voting, which includes IRV.
- **Instant Runoff Voting (IRV):** Refers specifically to the voting process for electing a single individual to a position, such as an executive office or single legislative seat. Voters rank their candidates and runoffs are simulated until one candidate has majority support.
- **Rounds:** Refers to the stages of vote-counting in IRV. When a last-place candidate is eliminated and these votes **redistributed** a majority is sought. If there is no majority, a new round occurs.
- **Exhausted ballot:** In some IRV elections voters only rank 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, while there may be more than three candidates. A ballot is "exhausted" when all candidates on it have been eliminated.

If you'd like to extend IRV to your state or city, here are more key terms to know.

### Campus to Community Terminology:

- **IRV-ready:** Voting equipment that is capable of running an IRV election without needing retrofitting or reprogramming. Versatile equipment is the ideal for new voting equipment today.
- **Charter:** The primary document that outlines how cities and counties work. Importantly, they include the procedure for elections within that jurisdiction. In order to implement IRV there must be a **charter amendment** or **charter reform**. Some cities have charter review commissions or panels that investigate possible additions or changes.
- **Ballot initiative:** a legal amendment to a state or city's law that is initiated by citizens' signatures. Not all states or cities allow citizens sponsored amendments. Those that do also have varying numbers of signatures needed to qualify the initiative.
- **Single-member district:** An elected office that corresponds to a single person. Single-member districts are, for example, a mayor, governor or legislator who is the only person that represents their district. These are offices which would use IRV.
- **Multi-member district:** An elected office that has more than one person filling seats and representing constituents. Common examples would be school boards or city councils, where they do not have specific districts they represent. Multi-member districts often use plurality voting.
- **Open primary:** A primary election in which voters can choose which party's primary they wish to vote in.
- **Closed primary:** A primary election in which voters may only vote in the primary that corresponds to their registered party. (Only registered Republicans vote in the Republican primary, etc.)

# WARD 8

## TEST BALLOT - ANNUAL CITY MEETING

### BURLINGTON, VERMONT

### MARCH 7, 2006

- A. To vote, fill in the OVAL ☐ to the right of the candidate of your choice like this ☒.
- B. To vote for a person whose name is not printed on the ballot, write-in the name in the space provided and fill in the oval.
- C. Follow the special instructions for the mayoral election.
- D. If you wrongly mark, tear or spoil the ballot, return it and get another.

#### For MAYOR

Three-Year Term

*Special instructions: Rank candidates for mayor in order of choice.*

- Fill in the number 1 oval (1) to the right of your 1st choice candidate.
- You may rank as many or as few candidates as you wish.
- Fill in the number 2 oval (2) to the right of your 2nd choice candidate.
- Fill in the number 3 oval (3) to the right of your 3rd choice, and so on.
- Fill in no more than one oval per column.
- Fill in no more than one oval per candidate.

(Rank candidates in order of choice)

		1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice	5th Choice	6th Choice
<b>Hugh Barrows</b> 123 Main Street	REPUBLICAN	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Paula Cooper</b> 123 Main Street	INDEPENDENT	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Michelle Ferengetti-Smith</b> 123 Main Street	DEMOCRATIC	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Jeff Lopez</b> 123 Main Street	PROGRESSIVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>David L. Morrison</b> 123 Main Street	GREEN	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Faye Wong</b> 123 Main Street	LIBERTARIAN	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Write-in	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)

No more than one oval per column    No more than one oval per candidate

#### For SCHOOL COMMISSIONER

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>ROBERT LAMSON</b> 123 Main Street	<input type="radio"/>
<b>SHEILA PORTER</b> 123 Main Street	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in	<input type="radio"/>

#### For WARD CLERK

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>CYNTHIA KELLY</b> 123 Main Street	REPUBLICAN	<input type="radio"/>
<b>JASON M. RICHARDSON</b> 123 Main Street	PROGRESSIVE	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in		<input type="radio"/>

#### For INSPECTOR OF ELECTION

Three-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>JOSE MARTINEZ</b> 123 Main Street	INDEPENDENT	<input type="radio"/>
<b>NIKOLAI CHERTOFF</b> 123 Main Street	DEMOCRATIC	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in		<input type="radio"/>

#### For CITY COUNCILOR

Two-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>CYNTHIA KELLY</b> 123 Main Street	DEMOCRATIC	<input type="radio"/>
<b>JASON M. RICHARDSON</b> 123 Main Street	REPUBLICAN	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in		<input type="radio"/>

#### For INSPECTOR OF ELECTION

One-Year Term

(Vote for Not More Than ONE)

<b>LAURIE LENTZ</b> 123 Main Street	INDEPENDENT	<input type="radio"/>
Write-in		<input type="radio"/>

**Ballot Continued on Back**  
**Vote BOTH Sides**



# Eight Steps to Campus IR *Victory*

## **Be a “FairVote Campus Leader”**

Welcome to the movement for free and fair elections! We're excited to have you. An important part of being a Campus Leader is **sharing your successes**, so we can spread the word. Let us know when something you've done has contributed to an IR*Victory*: from getting an op-ed published to the adoption of IRV at your college. Contact us at [IRV@fairvote.org](mailto:IRV@fairvote.org) so we can **feature you on our website** and use your achievements as an inspiration for others! IR*Victory* can be yours, *just take these basic steps*.

### **Step 1: The Foundation of an IR*Victory***

To lead a successful reform campaign, you must organize yourself and your thoughts; gather basic information; build the argument for reform; prepare to overcome logistical obstacles; and design your campaign strategy. Find relevant data from your recent campus elections via website or talking with a student government administrator. Studying the problems will help you to sell the benefits of reform. Understanding how your solution would work and be implemented will help you pre-empt skeptics' criticisms. Developing a campaign strategy, finally, will give you the ultimate roadmap to victory.

### **Step 2: Sell the Solution**

Once you have the base of research and knowledge needed to discuss electoral reform, you must develop a plan to sell the solution, and then carry that plan out. You must target your audience, develop your message, and choose your tactics. Targeting your audience helps to reveal who most needs to hear your message. Developing a message is about determining what to say, and how best to say it. Choosing your tactics involves deciding how you can most effectively speak to your target audiences. Tactics include presenting to school organizations, canvassing around campus or at public events, conducting sample elections, writing letters-to-the-editor of your college newspaper and possibly launching a website.

### **Step 3: Build Models**

Your target community needs to understand that a new voting system is not untested or radical. A number of cities, nations and colleges use “alternative” voting methods; still, it is always helpful to have local examples to breed familiarity and acceptance of reform. One way to do this is to convince on-campus organizations to adopt your system for their board or leadership elections. Around the country, over forty student government elections have moved to ranked and/or proportional voting. These reforms help build trusted models for you to point to for your campaign.

### **Step 4: Get Endorsed**

Another key step toward building momentum and legitimacy for improved voting systems is to gain an official recommendation from your student government. If your student association initiates a committee to study election reform, attempt to join it. If you cannot, take advantage of their investigation by highlighting the problems within the current system. Ask to make a presentation or provide





## Eight Steps to Campus IR *Victory* (cont'd)

educational materials to the commission. The most important thing is to be persistent and thorough. Endorsement by a reform committee or election committee will much improve chances of IRV success.

### **Step 5: Build Political Support**

Other student leaders serve as either the gatekeepers to electoral reforms, or as influential allies. As a result, it is usually critical to try and build support amongst this key group of people, and to keep consistent constituent pressure on them. At this stage, all of the prior work comes in handy. A core group of supporters, armed with extensive research and examples from the community, along with the recommendation of an official body can go a long way towards persuading student government leaders to support voting reform. Part of this process, however, should involve doing active outreach to the student body through Op-eds and letters-to-the-editor.

### **Step 6: Pass Legislation**

If the above steps have been taken, it may be time to seek legislative action. The best way to achieve this is to find governing body members who are willing to sponsor legislation to improve elections on your campus. Your sponsors can help you identify how best to persuade the others, as well as to identify potential obstacles to reform and counter-arguments that are likely to be presented. Should the group decline to pass the reform, ask your sponsors to take the matter directly to the voters by putting the reform on the ballot. On some campuses, a referendum may be necessary either way. Student-initiated ballot initiatives are also a possibility, but should be conducted only after seeking a measure backed by the governing body. Student-initiated drives are time and labor-intensive, but signature gathering is a good way to educate voters while moving the initiative forward.

### **Step 7: Put It On the Ballot**

If your efforts paid off and reform will be put before the voters, the hard work is about to begin! It is time to assemble a team of canvassing volunteers who will distribute easy-to-understand literature to educate others. You should also re-double efforts to gain the endorsements of key student leaders and organizations for your initiative. Also, aggressively seek support from campus editorial boards.

### **Step 8: Implement**

If your campaign for reform is successful, congratulations! ... But the work is not over yet! Stay in touch with student leaders and administrators to develop a timetable for implementation. The best way for this to be done is to have a defined date for implementation written into the legislation so that IRV can speedily be put into place. Most importantly, make sure steps are taken immediately to bring voting equipment into compliance with the new voting method. This often involves online voting for campus elections. Investigate how to acquire or develop software for the election. Lastly, make sure adequate voter education is conducted on the new system and that the ballot design is sufficiently clear.



# Prepare Yourself

In order to launch a successful IRV campaign, one of the most important things is to start off by knowing where you are going in the campaign. This means understanding the problem, the solution, what your goals are and how you plan to get there.

## 1. Organize Yourself and Your Thoughts

- **Budget your time and find some help (ask FairVote)!** If you can, build a core of enthusiastic advocates. Even one or two will help you divide the initial tasks and will later on lead to a wider sense of ownership over the campaign.
- **Record everything.** Develop a way to keep track of contacts, supporters, notes from meetings and conversations, campaign strategy, etc. Also use FairVote and the Yahoo! IRV Group for resources and helpful information.

## 2. Gather Basic Information

What elected body or positions are the target for reform?

- Executive or legislative \_\_\_\_\_?
- How are the elections and offices currently configured (Multi-member, single-member, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_?
- Do the targeted seats use a plurality system or a runoff  
\_\_\_\_\_?

Find out more about how voting is conducted at your school. See the **Services and Resources** page for more information on how FairVote can assist you in bringing IRV compatible systems to your campus.

## 3. Build the Argument for Reform

- **Studying the problems** before you begin your campaign will help you understand how to sell the benefits of reform.
- **When thinking about elections, here are some things to consider:**
  - Yes No **Negative campaigns** – do campaigns focus less on issues and more on personal attacks?
  - Yes No **Minority rule and the “spoiler effect”** – do the winners end up representing less than 50% of the voters?
  - Yes No **Low voter turnout** – are students not engaged in elections?
  - Yes No **Vacancies** – are they filled by appointment instead of special election? Do many people run, thus making a weak plurality winner likely?
  - Yes No **Runoffs** – do they exist? If so, is voter turnout lower in the runoffs?
  - Yes No **Underrepresentation** – are some voting groups shut out? By party or political beliefs? By gender? By race?
- **If you answered yes to any of these questions, your school needs IRV!**



# Prepare Yourself

## 4. Understand the Legal Aspects

- The procedure as it stands: What does your student government constitution and bylaws say about voting and elections? Which document is the target of reform?
- Gate-keepers of reform: Who can make the decision to change the policy? Are there multiple layers of decision-makers; for instance, must the campus government decide to put reform on the ballot, and let the student body decide from there?
- What power do I have?: Some schools allow students to place questions directly on the ballot through an initiative process. Is this an option? Is it the best option? Is it something to fall back on?

## 5. Design your Campaign Strategy

The purpose of any strategy is to allow you to achieve your objectives in the most efficient way possible. Here is a sample campaign strategy skeleton, to give you an idea.

### Goals

- Short-term / partial victories: Recommendation by a rules commission, passage of a non-binding resolution or referendum, etc.
- Short-term goal: Have the student government place a referendum on the ballot.
- Intermediate goal: Pass a binding referendum to adopt IRV.
- Intermediate goal: Ensure logistical feasibility of implementation.
- Long-term goal: Adopt instant runoff voting (IRV) at your college.

### Organizational Considerations

- Resources: Two or three core leaders; six occasional volunteers...
- Group-strengthening goals: Raise some money; build leadership group and supporters

### Constituents, Allies, and Opponents

- Who cares enough to help / whose problem is it? Ethnic and political minority groups with historically poor representation; students with free time or want campaign experience; challenger candidates looking for an issue to champion...
  - What do they gain / what risks do they take? Groups gain representation; challenger candidates gain political traction
  - Into what groups are they organized? Campus groups / campus parties
- Who are your opponents? One "old guard" student politician; a stubborn school newspaper; a skeptical school organization
  - What will my victory cost them? The traditional way of voting; potentially may cost them politically
  - What will they do to oppose you? Use ads; write negative editorials

### Targets

- Primary target(s): School elections administrator for implementation; student voters; campus policymakers; a relevant committee or commission
- Secondary target(s): Supportive professors; influential school groups; friends of students in school government.

### Tactics

- Publicize support from candidates, officials, alumni, student group leaders; educate voters and collect petitions through student government meetings, voting demonstrations, and canvassing; get positive op-eds and letters-to-the-editor published.





# Selling the Solution: Communication Strategies

## Strategic Thinking

- *Finding your key supporters*

If you could convince a dozen people to embrace your message today, who would they be? What things do they need to believe in your campaign?

- *How will you reach them?*

Where does your target audience get information and what groups or individuals have influence on them? Who can help deliver your message? Start small and try to build circles of influence with campus groups, organizers and student leaders.

## Sharing Your Message

Realize that **the facts do not sell themselves**. You have to think about what to say and the most effective way to say it.

Your message should answer the questions: Why? Why care? Why act? You must explain what's valued and what's at risk. Your message will align you with others who share your values and concerns.

## General Principles

- **Do not assume that everyone understands.**  
Many people are not familiar with electoral systems design.
- **Build on what your audience knows and believes.**  
"One person-one vote," "majority rule," and "representation for all" are concepts that most Americans have learned by middle school. Explain how in our system some votes count more than others, how the majority does not always rule, and how a group of voters can win all the representation while others are shut out.

- **Remain constant while tailoring your message for specific audiences**

Frame the facts by appealing to values (justice, fairness), more than rationality (it's mathematically superior!). Think about how you can best inspire your listeners.

- **Avoid jargon, technical mumbo-jumbo.**

- **Don't Say...**

"Change the voting system"  
"Threshold"  
"Eliminates strategic voting"  
"Votes are transferred"

### Do Say...

"We want to improve the voting system"  
"Enough votes to win"  
"You can just vote for who you believe in"  
"If your top choices doesn't win, your vote can go to your next choice."



## Small Victories

Establishing IRV is also about winning the little battles that get people familiar with different voting methods. It's also **great practice**. By writing a letter to the editor, canvassing your school, asking leaders and professors if they support IRV, holding a demonstration election with a few friends or convincing a student group to use IRV, you're **building bridges** toward an IRV America where instant runoff voting is the norm, not the exception.



# Making a Presentation for Instant Runoff Voting

## INTRODUCTION:

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is a better way to guarantee majority winners in single-seat election, such as those of student government executive or class officers.

## WHERE IRV IS USED:

1. **In colleges** – examples: Princeton, UC Berkeley, Rice, MIT, Wake Forrest, U. of Washington
2. **Internationally** - Australia, Ireland, London, and Papua New Guinea.
3. **American cities** - San Francisco, Burlington VT, Ferndale MI and Takoma Park MD.

## PLURALITY ELECTIONS AND FIVE PROBLEMS:

Plurality elections are the most common type used in America: whoever has the most votes, wins. There are a number of problems with this type of elections:

1. Often produce **non-majority winners**
  - a. Runoffs can ensure a majority, but come with their own problems
    - i. **Lower turnout in runoffs**
      1. From 1994 to 2004, of 96 federal primary runoffs, 94 had lower turnout and overall turnout averaged only 35%.
      2. **Spoiler problem**
  - b. In a race with more than two candidates, it is possible that a candidate with little chance of winning can draw away enough votes from another candidate with similar positions, resulting in a win for a candidate less favored by the majority
  - c. Negative campaigning: candidates mount **personal attacks** to be the sole choice of voters

## INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING AND FIVE SOLUTIONS:

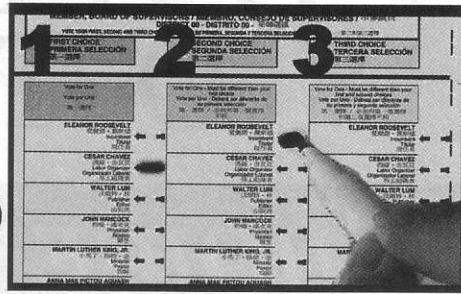
1. Always a **majority winner**; the process of instant runoffs continues until one candidate receives a majority
2. At **no additional cost for runoffs**
  - a. No runoff means no extra campaign costs and no additional election costs.
  - b. Example: San Francisco saves \$1.2 million annually with the elimination of the city's runoff elections
3. One election, **more choice**; results in **higher voter turnout**.
4. **No spoiler** problem because citizens can vote their conscience
  - a. Candidates with similar positions do not have to fear splitting their base of support or being spoilers
  - b. Voters do not have to fear that they will cast a wasted vote
5. Encourages **positive campaigning**
  - a. Candidates need to gain second preference support from other candidates' voters

## WHAT TO DO NEXT:

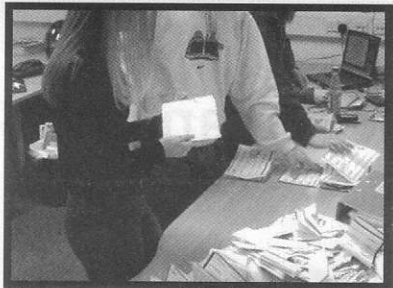
1. Give a demonstration to illustrate how it works and show the logic (works great with 20-30 people)
  - a. Use favorite music groups, colors, etc.
2. Next, address IRV concerns
  - a. Too complicated for voters  
*Reality: Exit polls prove that IRV makes sense with voter education.*
  - b. Creates headaches for election administration  
*Reality: fewer burdens on election officials – only one election.*
  - c. Voting equipment cannot handle the ballots  
*Reality: Online election software exists at many colleges and can be easily developed*  
*Reality: Votes could easily be hand-counted, as they do in the small cities of Burlington, VT and Takoma Park, MD*

# HOW RANKED CHOICE VOTING WORKS

- Rank candidates 1, 2, 3...
- (It's best to use all three of your rankings)



## Voters Rank Candidates



**Eliminate Candidate with Fewest Number of Votes**

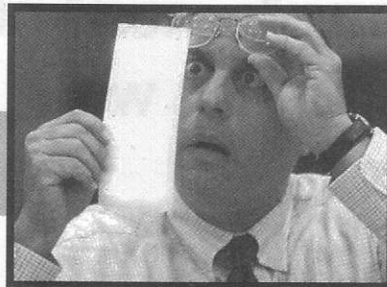
*Redistribute Votes from Eliminated Candidate to Voters' Next Choices*



## Count the Votes

for each voter's highest ranked candidate that hasn't been eliminated

No



**Is There a Majority?**

Yes



## Declare a Winner

- No need for December Runoff
- \$3 million saved (for citywide runoff)



# Services and Resources for Campus FairVote Activists

FairVote - *The Center for Voting and Democracy* assists national and international advocates for instant runoff voting. We encourage you to take advantage of the following FairVote services and resources:

## Website

FairVote strives to make all of resources available online. This includes an extensive library of [articles](#), as well as [educational materials](#), [original research](#), [election data and analysis](#), and [organizing materials](#). Our website is [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org).

## Voting Software and Development

A key aspect of any IRV campaign is figuring out how best to process ranked ballots. Some schools have created online voting software or other procedures on their own. Additionally, FairVote has invested in the development of a user-friendly [generic version of online voting software](#), which we may be able to meet the needs of your student body elections. FairVote is here for advice and assistance on this and any related matters.

## Brochures

The IRV brochures produced by FairVote can be downloaded and printed for free using our website or, for larger amounts, may be purchased by contacting FairVote directly.

## Speakers, training, and conferences

Drawing upon our nationwide network of staff, board members, allies and FairVote members; we provide speakers, conduct trainings and hold regional and national conferences for citizens, elected official and election administrators.

## Legal and technical assistance

FairVote provides [expert testimony and amicus briefs](#) on voting rights and redistricting cases, as well as advice and [assistance for jurisdictions considering purchasing new voting equipment](#).

## Drafting legislation

FairVote has [drafted legislation](#) at local, state and federal levels to adopt instant runoff voting, to allow instant runoff voting and to create commissions that review election laws.

## Election consulting and administration

FairVote provides consulting services to both public sector and private sector clients on all aspects of elections. FairVote does not, however, do political consulting. We assist groups wishing to conduct elections, and we provide both consulting on electoral system design as well as one-stop election services from the distribution of ballots to the certification and reporting of results. We have assisted both for-profit and non-profit organizations. We will help any organization that needs this assistance.

Please contact us for assistance:

## FairVote - The Center for Voting and Democracy

6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 610

Takoma Park, MD 20912

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# Writing a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed

## Writing a letter to the editor (LTE):

- Make it short (100 words is good; 150 words maximum)
- Go for a near-conversational tone – there is no need to use fancy words
- Format your LTE as a column (see below)
- LTE's are generally meant to be reactions to something previously written on the Editorial/Op-Ed page of that newspaper.
- Make it interesting! If it bores you, it will bore the paper.
- SAMPLE LTE:

To the Editor:

Our recent election for \_\_\_\_\_ should not be considered a success! Rather, it is a good example of our flawed election system. Candidate A was elected with less than 50% - he/she only represents a minority of voters. Candidates B and C have similar positions and split the vote. This is the "spoiler" problem in action, and happens often.

How can we continue using a system that leaves the majority out in the cold?

Instant runoff voting (IRV), which is used at more than 35 universities including Duke, Harvard and Berkeley, would allow voters to rank candidates. If your first choice doesn't have the support to win, your second choice is used and so on until we have a winner who best represents the majority of voters. We could use a change like that in our elections. IRV is simple, fair and just plain good for democracy.

John Smith  
Libertyville, IA

## Writing an opinion editorial (Op-ed):

- Opinion editorials (op-eds) are longer than letters to the editor and are not necessarily responses to other articles/commentary
- Op-eds should be well-crafted pieces of analysis and opinion written with a professional tone
- Use a relevant example of unfair elections to frame the argument for IRV
  1. Assess the example, highlighting problems of current plurality or runoff systems (minority rule, a "spoiler," low turnout, etc.)
  2. Next, lay out what IRV is, how it works and why adopting it improves elections
  3. Throughout the text, try to incorporate ideas that appeal to popular notions such as majority rule, fairness, less negative campaigning, better choices, etc.
  4. Remember, IRV is better and there are lots of reasons why (see "Talking Points" and "Selling the Solution" sheets)
- Be sure to read an op-ed included in this packet

IF YOU GET AN OP-ED OR LTE PUBLISHED, BE SURE TO LET US KNOW!  
e-mail: [IRV@fairvote.org](mailto:IRV@fairvote.org) 6930 Carroll Ave Ste. 610  
phone: (301)-270-4616 Takoma Park, MD 20912



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Student Association Elections Undemocratic

Tuesday, March 21, 2006

To the Editor:

In response to Matthew Stoller's recent letter to the editor ("New Election System Could Save GUSA," The Hoya, Feb. 28, 2006, A3), our organization, FairVote, The Center for Voting and Democracy, supports his arguments on Georgetown's need for reform in its undergraduate student assembly elections.

Upon looking at the past few GUSA elections, it is clear that recent presidents have not been elected with a majority of the vote. Most of the winning candidates, such as last year's victor Pravin Rajan (SFS '07), have only garnered pluralities in the mid-30s.

Think about this — more than 60 percent of Georgetown voters did not want Rajan as their first choice.

Here's where a simple method called instant runoff voting (IRV) would fit. IRV, which is currently implemented at about 35 universities across the country, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard and Duke, eliminates the "spoiler" problem that comes with having more than two candidates and protects majority rule. Voters rank candidates in order of preference. Those receiving the fewest votes are eliminated and their second choices are tallied until a candidate receives 50 percent of the vote plus one to win.

This month's delay in electing GUSA President Twister Murchison (SFS '08) after the disqualification of Khalil Hibri (SFS '07) also added to the unnecessary drama in the system. Although the use of IRV may not have avoided Hibri's Election Commission violation, maybe Murchison would have won the majority fair and square if it had been in place — thus eliminating all the extra waiting for a president to fully serve the student body.

As a student myself at Bradley University, I understand how important it is for constituents to have their voices heard by student assembly leaders who represent the majority.

So, Georgetown, isn't it time for a change?

Amber Krosel

Communications Intern

FairVote, The Center for Voting and Democracy



# Sample Student Government Motion

WHEREAS Title \_\_\_\_, Chapter \_\_\_\_, Section \_\_\_\_ of the by-laws reads " [*the current text providing for plurality or runoff elections*]," and

WHEREAS [*any problem the student government association (SGA) has faced; ex: runoff elections cost the SGA \$XXXX for each instance; winners with less than majority support of the campus in recent elections; voter turnout has declined for runoffs in recent elections, etc.*]

WHEREAS instant runoff voting ensures that a candidate wins an election with majority support without the need for a runoff election, while encouraging positive campaigning,

BE IT ENACTED that Title \_\_\_\_, Chapter \_\_\_\_, Sections \_\_\_\_ of the by-laws be amended to read:

Section \_\_\_\_ For the purposes of this chapter, the following definitions shall apply:

"Instant Runoff Voting" means a method of casting and tabulating votes that simulates the ballot counts that would occur if all voters participated in a series of runoff elections with one candidate eliminated after each round of counting. In elections using the Instant Runoff Voting method, voters may rank the candidates in order of preference.

"Advancing candidate" means a candidate who has not been eliminated.

"Continuing ballot" means a ballot that is not an exhausted ballot.

"Exhausted ballot" means a ballot on which there are no choices marked other than choices for eliminated candidates.

Section \_\_\_\_ For the offices of [*SGA President, Vice President, Trustee, Area Government Officers, and all single-seat Senate races*], the ballots shall be counted by the method of instant runoff voting, prescribed herein:

1. The initial round of counting shall be a count of the first choices marked on each ballot. If any candidate receives a majority of the first choices, that candidate shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.
2. If no candidate receives a majority of first choices, there shall be a second round of counting. The last-place candidate shall be eliminated, and all the continuing ballots shall be recounted. Each continuing ballot shall be counted as one vote for that ballot's highest ranked advancing candidate.
3. If no candidate receives a majority at the second round of counting, there shall be a third round of counting, continuing in the manner prescribed above.
4. The process of eliminating the last-place candidates and recounting all the continuing ballots shall continue until one candidate receives a majority of the votes in a round. The candidate who receives a majority of the votes in a round shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.
5. If a ballot does not list a preference for a single round, the process will continue with the next ranking. If a ballot has two or more consecutive rankings skipped, it shall not be counted in that or any subsequent round.
6. If there are not sufficient second and lower choices for any candidate to receive a majority, the candidate with the highest number of votes shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.
7. When a ballot becomes an exhausted ballot it shall not be counted in that round or any subsequent round.



Associated Students of Portland State University  
Elections Committee

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Resolution 01-2005  
14 February 2005

Regarding the implementation of Instant Runoff Voting

WHEREAS one of the primary objectives of ASPSU is to increase access to higher education

WHEREAS students vote to elect their representatives in the campus community

WHEREAS students should have the option to choose the system of voting used to elect their representatives in the larger campus community

WHEREAS the system of Plurality Voting allows a representative to be elected by a minority of votes

BE IT RESOLVED that the ASPSU Elections Committee strongly encourages the ASPSU Senate to approve a constitutional amendment allowing students the option of Instant Runoff Voting as an alternative to the current system of Plurality Voting.

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Ryan A. Schowen  
Chair, ASPSU Elections Committee

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Aaron O'Donnell  
Vice-Chair, ASPSU Elections Committee

## For Voters, Choice Is As Easy As 1, 2, 3 San Francisco Adopts Ranked Balloting

By KIMBERLY EDDIS  
Special to The Washington Post

**W**HEN voters here go to the polls in November to select their top choice for a seat on the city's Board of Supervisors, they also get to pick their second choice—and even their third.

Here, a winning candidate has to receive at least 50 percent of the vote for the Board of Supervisors, which is the local city council. In the past, if nobody did, there was a runoff election.

But this year, San Francisco has become the largest city in the nation to adopt a form of voting that proponents say is a little like walking into an ice cream shop to order a chocolate cone only to discover the shop is all out—no problem, just order your next favorite flavor, and if that's out, your third.

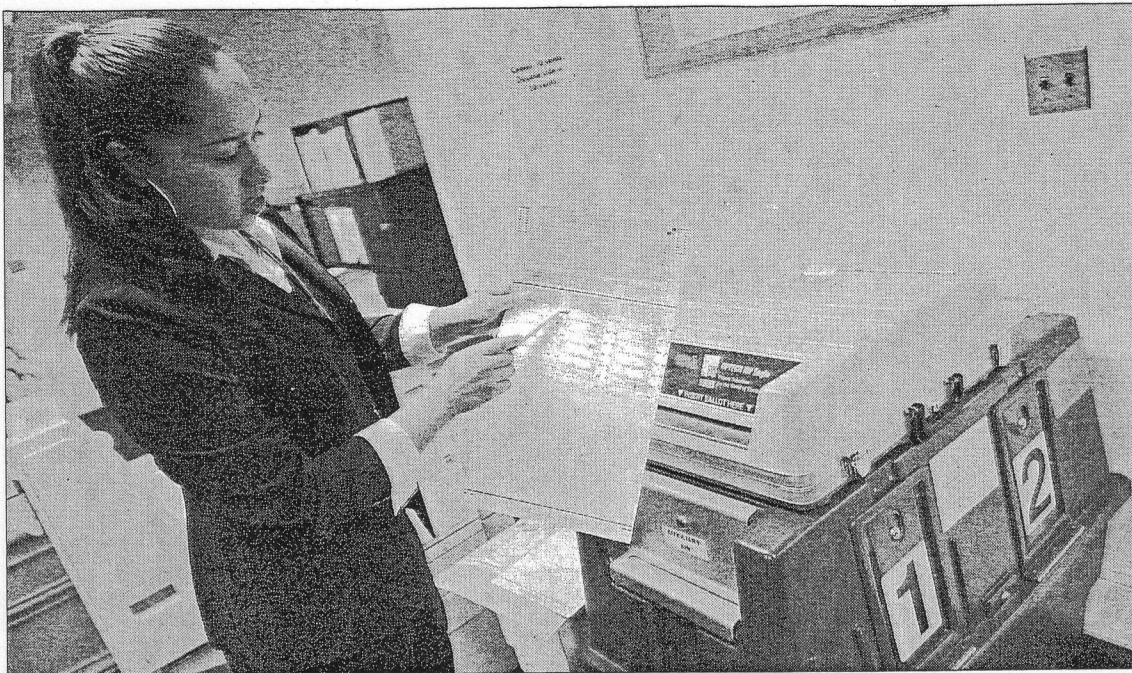
Calvin Lau, 50, an interior designer here, can't wait. He's tired of the heaps of campaign literature cramming his mailbox and dreads the prospect of a runoff.

"In this city there are always runoffs. Runoffs for mayor, runoffs for board of supervisor. It's always neck and neck here, and there are always, always runoffs. Let's just get it all over with at once," Lau said. "This is going to save me some time. I already have my three picked out."

Advocates said the new system has made campaigning more civilized—candidates don't want to lose out on the chance to be a voter's second or third choice by appearing too negative. And they say it may increase turnout.

But opponents say the new system is too complicated, will discourage turnout and forces candidates to spread themselves too thin.

Here's how it will work: Voters will select three candidates in order of preference. All of the top-choice votes are tallied. If any candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote, that candidate wins. If no candidate has a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-place votes is eliminated. Voters who marked the losing candidate as their first choice will have their votes counted for their second-choice can-



PHOTOS BY BEN MARGOT—ASSOCIATED PRESS

In San Francisco, Campaign Services Coordinator Giannina Miranda displays the checks on her sample ranked-choice ballot, shown below, on which voters get a second and third choice for city supervisor. Ballot instructions are in English, Spanish and Chinese.

didate. The process continues until one candidate receives a majority of the vote; tallying could take several days.

"With runoffs, you have two different electorates going to the polls," said Steven Hill, with the Center on Voting and Democracy, which has been pushing ranked-choice voting in municipalities across the country.

"This way you elect the strongest candidate who has the majority of the vote and you're getting it over with in one race. It's just common sense."

Advocates say the best argument for the new system is that it prevents a third-party spoiler. Had the system been in place in Florida during the 2000 presidential election, Ralph Nader—with the fewest first place votes—would have been eliminated. Those ballots would have had their second-choice votes counted—these presumably would have gone to Al Gore. The added votes would have given Gore the majority.

"People really get to vote for the person they want to vote for, not just the person they feel has the better chance of winning," Hill said. "Their vote isn't wasted."

Critics worry that the system could be difficult for voters to navigate and that the added confusion could turn off minority and other groups with already low turnout.

The system is used around the world, but it has yet to catch on in the United

DEMONSTRATION BALLOT / BALOTA DE MUESTRA / 樣板票

CONSOLIDATED GENERAL ELECTION / ELECCIONES GENERALES CONSOLIDADAS / 綜合選舉

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO / CIUDAD Y CONDADO DE SAN FRANCISCO / 舊金山市及縣

NOVEMBER 2, 2004 / 2 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2004 / 2004年11月2日

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 12, SENATE DISTRICT 17, ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 17, DISTRICT 9

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS: Mark your first choice in the first column by completely filling in the bubble. To indicate a second choice, mark a bubble in the second column. To indicate a third choice, mark a bubble in the third column. To indicate a fourth choice, mark a bubble in the fourth column. To indicate a fifth choice, mark a bubble in the fifth column. To indicate a sixth choice, mark a bubble in the sixth column. To indicate a seventh choice, mark a bubble in the seventh column. To indicate an eighth choice, mark a bubble in the eighth column. To indicate a ninth choice, mark a bubble in the ninth column. To indicate a tenth choice, mark a bubble in the tenth column. To indicate an eleventh choice, mark a bubble in the eleventh column. To indicate a twelfth choice, mark a bubble in the twelfth column. To indicate a thirteenth choice, mark a bubble in the thirteenth column. To indicate a fourteenth choice, mark a bubble in the fourteenth column. 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To indicate a twenty-eighth choice, mark a bubble in the twenty-eighth column. To indicate a twenty-ninth choice, mark a bubble in the twenty-ninth column. To indicate a thirtieth choice, mark a bubble in the thirtieth column. To indicate a thirty-first choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-first column. To indicate a thirty-second choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-second column. To indicate a thirty-third choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-third column. To indicate a thirty-fourth choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-fourth column. To indicate a thirty-fifth choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-fifth column. To indicate a thirty-sixth choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-sixth column. To indicate a thirty-seventh choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-seventh column. To indicate a thirty-eighth choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-eighth column. To indicate a thirty-ninth choice, mark a bubble in the thirty-ninth column. To indicate a fortieth choice, mark a bubble in the fortieth column. 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FIRST CHOICE PRIMERA SELECCION 第一選擇	SECOND CHOICE SEGUNDA SELECCION 第二選擇	THIRD CHOICE TERCERA SELECCION 第三選擇
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT	ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT	ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ	CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ	CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ CEAR CHAVEZ
WALTER LUM WALTER LUM WALTER LUM	WALTER LUM WALTER LUM WALTER LUM	WALTER LUM WALTER LUM WALTER LUM
JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK	JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK	JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK JOHN HANCOCK
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States. Ann Arbor, Mich., abandoned the method after just one election in the 1970s. Cambridge, Mass., uses a version to elect its City Council. Dozens of cities and counties across the country, including Los Angeles, are looking into the idea, and everyone is keeping an eye on San Francisco.

Detractors say that despite an extensive public information campaign, many voters don't understand the system. "It's complicated. You're trying to tell people why you're the best candidate while at the same time you're trying to do education

about how to do ranked-choice voting," said Robert Haaland, a candidate for a district that includes Haight-Ashbury who nonetheless supports the new system.

In the district near Golden Gate Park, Supervisor Jake McGoldrick has been battling an "anybody but Jake" campaign against six challengers and a host of outside business interests. One of his campaign advisers said the new system did not make for positive campaigning.

"The proponents' pie-in-the-sky idea was that [the new system] will encourage everyone to be nice to each other. It's quite the opposite in that everyone has the incentive to go negative against the incumbent," said political consultant Jim Stearns, who represents two other incumbent supervisors besides McGoldrick.

But 22 contenders battling to fill the spot of Supervisor Matt Gonzalez, who is leaving office, have embraced the concept wholeheartedly. The district is seen as one of the city's more liberal, and candidates have been meeting regularly to discuss the issues facing the area. Candidates have pledged to work together with the winner.

While Haaland and Michael O'Connor, another candidate seeking the same seat, are concentrating on getting as many number one votes as possible, they are sure to mention each other if voters are looking for a number two suggestion.

They have co-hosted a hip-hop party to raise money for their campaigns. Proceeds were split down the middle.

"It was really cool," Haaland said. "Our supporters got together, drank together and got along really well with each other. It wasn't my supporters on one side and his supporters on another."



# Oakland Tribune

OUR OPINION

SATURDAY

November 5, 2005

EVERY city that's tried it loves it. Instant-runoff voting has been a hit from Santa Monica to Humboldt County. Voters love it. Local election officials swear by it. Candidates sing its praises. So why are state legislators refusing to let it get out of committee?

Sen. Debra Bowen, D-Marina del Rey, chairwoman of the Senate Elections and Reapportionment Committee, introduced a bill allowing instant-runoff voting in cities and counties that have approved it.

Instant-runoff voting allows voters to choose a first, second and third choice of a candidate. If their first choice doesn't win a majority of votes, votes for the second, then third, candidates are counted.

Oakland city councilwoman Pat Kernighan said she would have preferred the system when she was elected to a vacant seat last spring. Running against a number of candidates, she won with 29 percent of the vote. She said she would feel more comfortable with a higher percentage, which she would likely have received if voters' second and third choices were counted.

In Berkeley, vice-mayor Kriss Worthington pointed out that instant-runoff voting saves the cost of a separate runoff election and encourages candidates to reach out to potential voters outside their base. He thinks it would result in less contentious campaigns.

Berkeley approved the system by 72 percent. Voters in San Leandro, Oakland, Santa Clara County and Davis also have overwhelmingly approved it in votes over the last few years.

## Instant runoffs:

## It's time will come

Alameda County officials have been waiting for the state government to provide some guidance, either through laws passed by legislators or regulations established by the Secretary of State's office.

After last month's committee meeting, county officials will have to turn to the Secretary of State's office. The other members of the elections and reapportionment committee said they don't support the law.

The biggest concern seems to be that it would give candidates outside of the two major parties a better chance.

That strikes us as an awfully short-sighted and self-serving rationale. If the voters like the system and it saves money, legislators should put aside their personal concerns. If major-party candidates are afraid to compete with third-party and independent candidates, rigging the system in their favor isn't the answer. In fact, we think the inclusion of more parties and ideas will broaden our political debates, increase voter interest and participation and strengthen our democracy.

We urge cities and counties to continue using instant-runoff voting. Perhaps the growing number of elections using the system and the sheer volume of positive results will force the state to provide guidelines. Our state legislators shouldn't be so small-minded and should put the good of the state before their petty interests.



***"The way democracy will be."***