

## Initiative spreads political engagement



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In front of Schaffer Library on Monday, September 17 students, faculty and staff had the opportunity to register to vote and share their values through the 50 State Initiative.

The 50 State Initiative was created by For Freedom, a non partisan group aimed at increasing civic engagement through public art and this event is targeted at creating discourse among people before the 2018 Midterm elections. There were four lawn signs offered to participants that had "Freedom of," "Freedom from," "Freedom to," and "Freedom for" with space below for people to write in what they believed defined freedom.

For the day, these lawn signs were displayed in front of the Nott Memorial. Some of the signs will be on display in the Schaffer Library Learning Commons until March 21.

In President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's State of the Union Address in 1941 he articulated his definition of freedom: "freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear."

In 1943, after the United States entered World War II, Norman Rockwell made four paintings depicting Roosevelt's vision of what freedom should entail and protect.

Definitions of freedom varied. Some people focused on broad concepts like love, media, government, self expression and one person even wrote, "What I feel is right." Others had more specific concerns, such as sharks, turtles, pollution, rights for undocumented immigrants and LGBTQ rights.

Many students gathered to take pictures of the lawn signs as they were displayed in front of the Nott Memorial.

Artists and founders of For Freedom, Hank Willis Thomas and Eric Gottesman, were inspired by these paintings to start the 50 State Initiative.

This initiative was spread across all of the states in the nation as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

In addition to the lawn signs used in the 50 State Initiative, For Freedom does displays on billboards, in town halls and other local spaces to encourage conversations about politics in communities.

Professor of Sociology Deidre Hill-Butler and Associate Professor of History Andrew Morris both expressed their desire to see more political engagement and discourse on campus during the Academic Symposium on Friday.

"College is a time to grow," Hill-Butler said.

This event was presented by the Mandeville Gallery and co-sponsored by the Department of Visual Arts, Multicultural Affairs, UNITAS and American Studies and Film Studies.