

The Daily Illini

UI Students for Organ Donation raise awareness of policy change

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The University has a lot of heart. One hundred and eighty-one of them, to be exact.

The local chapter of Students for Organ Donation is working with Donate Life Illinois to find 3,000 new organ donor registrants statewide by Nov. 14 in a contest called the Campus Challenge 2008.

As of Monday, the University was in second place out of 17 colleges with 181 new registrants. The College of DuPage is currently in the lead, with 269 new registrants.

"Our goal is to get people involved and the message out for the need to get organs for the 4,700 people waiting for transplants," said Erin Kasper, president of the University chapter of Students for Organ Donation and junior in AHS.

As of 2006, people who wish to be organ registrants must formally register instead of only signing the back of drivers' licenses. Registrants' first-person consent can only be overridden in unusual circumstances.

"They were finding in that with about 20 percent of people that died, the family would override those wishes (to be an organ donor)," said Diane Eikenberry, the Donate Illinois Campus campaign manager. "The whole idea is by registering, you are saying, 'This is my wish and it will be followed through on.'"

Though there were about six million people in the pre-2006 registry, it currently includes only about 3.8 million people. The Campus Challenge is designed to help Donate Life reach their goal of having five million donors in the registry by April 2009.

"There was a study done in Illinois fall 2006, 88 percent of people thought (organ donation) was the right thing to do," Eikenberry said. "So there's a discrepancy of people who think it's the right thing to do and people who actually sign up to be a donor."

Kasper attributes this discrepancy to people not knowing about the change in registration rules in 2006.

"We find that most people don't even know about it," Kasper said.

Ali Freter, freshman in LAS, said she hadn't known she was supposed to formally re-register to be a donor, but plans to do it.

"It's not like you're going to be needing (your organs) anymore," Freter said. "I know it sounds morbid, but it's true."

Eikenberry said the program heavily targets college students because they are so willing to get involved.

"In college, that's the time when you're out in the world for the first time and having new experiences and helping people," Eikenberry said. "College students are very open to the idea of organ donation."

Kasper said she hopes the school's involvement in the Campus Challenge will raise awareness of the need for organ donors in Illinois.

Take a minute to register at www.donatelife.org. All you need is your license or state ID.