

Few running in this year's SU Councillor elections

Veteran councillors express concern that not enough is being done to raise awareness on campus about the importance of Students' Council—suggestions for improvement include reducing the number of elected seats and increasing training time

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The Students' Union Executive election may be over, but with Students' Council elections taking place 22–23 March, polling stations haven't disappeared from campus just yet.

Council is the ultimate authority of the SU and consists of 50 members—including 42 elected faculty councillors positions distributed by faculty population. However, despite the importance Council plays in directing the SU, few students have signed up to run—with Arts and Law as the only faculties where there are more candidates running than there are positions to fill.

SU Chief Returning Officer Rachel Woynorowski explained that it's normal for there to be large discrepancies in the number of candidates who apply from year to year.

"In this year's election, we have fewer candidates than in last year's election simply because the amount of candidates we get tends to fluctuate on a fairly regular basis in fairly large extremes one way or another," she said.

She added that factors influencing students' desire to get involved in the SU include who else is running that year and also who had been elected to the executive.

But when asked why more students don't seem to show an interest in the SU, Board of Governors representative Chris Samuel said not enough is being done to advertise the role Council plays.

"We're not doing a good enough job of communicating the importance of Students' Council. A lot of people don't see it as a valuable, worthwhile use of their time," Samuel said. "[T]he reality is that it's a very important body that makes a lot of important decisions, but students don't hear about that."

But the number of candidates running isn't the only issue that's bothering veteran SU members. Justin Kehoe, who's served on Council three times as a science councillor and once as Vice-President (student life), said he was disappointed to see so few candidates had taken the time to fill out a biography or platform statement on the SU's webpage and noted that of those who did often

didn't show a deep understanding of how the organization operates.

"It's just one of the biggest turn-overs I've seen. I think there's five people returning, and a lot of the people [running] seem to be first- and second-year students," he said, explaining that many would-be first-time councillors might underestimate the importance of the role.

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**CHRIS SAMUEL,
BOARD OF GOVERNOR REP**

"It's unfortunate. On the one hand, it's the top governing body of the organization that is there to direct and oversee the Executive, but on the

other hand, a lot of people see Council as kind of an entry-level type of group where you get elected ... then you work your way up to Executive," Kehoe said.

Councillor candidates are given between \$30–\$50 to use on their campaign depending on the size of their faculty. However, despite being provided with resources, not every candidate has taken the time to make posters or do classroom speeches—a sign of apathy Kehoe said does little to improve the notoriously low voter turnout Council elections garner. Last year only 4.9 per cent of eligible voters cast ballots in the March 2006 Councillor election.

"Councillors themselves need to take themselves more seriously, take the Council more seriously, and hopefully there's some sort of culture shift that comes in line with some more physical reforms in the size of the Council and its composition," Kehoe said, adding that he believes the organization could benefit from some drastic steps, such as decreasing the number of councillors and improving the work that goes into transitioning and training new members.

Woynorowski noted that the SU does urge candidates to be active

during the campaign period but that, ultimately, they decide how much efforts they put in.

"It's completely up to the candidates what they want to do. We do encourage the candidates to all think about why they're running and to inform students why they're running," she said.

But Kehoe noted he doesn't think it's up to one person to come up with a "miracle solution" and added that despite being new, some councillors next year might have "a lot of good ideas and learn really fast."

"It [just] frustrates me as someone who spent the last four years on that Council, with all the time and effort that I've put in, still coming out realizing that the Council isn't really significantly better off in the perspective of the average student," he said.

Vacancies remaining after this election will be filled in a by-election in the fall, after which any position still empty will remain so for the year.

To view a complete list of the candidates who are running and their biographies and platforms, please see: www.su.ualberta.ca/vote.

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