

Council depending on by-election to fill empty seats

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Deputy News Editor

Students' Union by-elections are coming up at the end of the month, with Students' Council facing a substantial deficit of sitting Councillors.

There are currently 17 empty seats on Council out of a total of 42, leaving only 25 filled. The number of vacancies was increased by the end of August with the resignation of five councillors. Another 18 remain unfilled on the General Faculties Council (GFC).

However, SU Chief Returning Officer Craig Turner said he's confident the seats will adequately be filled.

"Based on our high number of vacancies right now, I'm optimistic that we're going to see an unprecedented amount of interest from all sides—from candidates who are interested in running, from voters realizing their vote is important, and from the media."

Turner is currently undertaking a marketing campaign that's targeting each faculty individually in order to let voters know that they have a voice through their elected representatives. However, he wasn't willing to comment on why initial interest during last year's elections had been lower than normal.

Since he wasn't here last year, Turner explained, he "wouldn't like to speculate on the situations that have come up in the past."

"I'd rather like to look at how we're going to get people to run in this election and how we're going to get voters out."

SU President Michael Janz was more

open to commenting on the state of the student electorate.

"I think there are so many empty seats because students don't realize how important Students' Council is," Janz explained via email. "Council is interesting, fun, and a great opportunity to get involved with your community."

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CRAIG TURNER
SU CHIEF RETURNING OFFICER

Turner explained that, according to the SU's Bylaw 100, at least 30 seats need to be filled in order to cease the election process. If less than five seats are filled during the by-election, calls for candidates will continue until twelve or less seats are vacant.

With the 17 September by-elections nomination deadline fast approaching, Turner didn't want to divulge how many interested candidates had approached him to run.

"I've been contacted by a number of people who are interested in running, but I'm not going to disclose that sort of information until the nomination deadline," he said. "There definitely has been interest brought to my attention."

By-elections last September saw eleven empty seats on Students' Council, with all but four ultimately

being filled; meanwhile, six GFC seats were available with only two remaining vacant.

Last year, Council introduced councillor remuneration to help boost interest in potential candidates, as well as to try to increase Council's accountability. However, the program has recently come under fire by some members of the SU as being a waste and not an effective measure to drive-up interest.

"Councillor pay was brought [in] under the [belief] that it would make Council more productive, we would attract better councillors, and more councillors would be committed to the organization," Janz said. "I don't believe that we've seen that, and I don't believe it's been a successful experiment."

"Council has been a volunteer activity for 95 other years of our SU's existence, and I don't think that the one-year experiment to pay councillors has paid off," he continued.

However, Council remains somewhat divided on the issue, as some see remuneration as a positive program.

Agriculture and Forestry councillor Jacqueline Geller feels more time and support is needed for the remuneration program to accurately gauge results.

"We haven't given the program enough time to effectively evaluate it," Geller explained. "We haven't been able to see if it can attract councillors, especially since there's no advertising and no real outreach in regards to finding potential councillors and telling them that they're paid."

Council pay is scheduled to be debated in October, after by-elections have taken place and when there are expected to be less vacant seats.

Empty Seats Leading up to By-Elections	By-Election Deadlines
1 - Agriculture and Forestry	17 September - 5pm Nomination Deadline
3 - Arts	19 September - 9am Start of Campaigning
2 - Education	26 September - 9pm End of Campaigning
2 - Engineering	27 September - 9am Polls Open
1 - Medicine and Oral Health Sciences	28 September - 5pm Polls Closed
2 - Nursing	
2 - Open Studies	
1 - Physical Education	
3 - Science	

For more information, contact SU CRO Craig Turner cro@ualberta.ca

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