

EDITORIAL

Elections, elections, elections

by Lynne Wanyeki

The Student Union elections are to be held next week. The elections begin with the advance polls on Tuesday March 17, and continue through Wednesday March 18 and Thursday March 19. Unfortunately, it is my opinion that this year will see an even lower voter turn-out than the abysmal 19% of the student population that voted last year.

I say this because the campaigning efforts of the various candidates have left a great deal to be desired. This can be seen even at the most superficial level, for fewer candidates than ever before have made the effort to at least make their name and desired Student Union Council position known by means of posters throughout the different university buildings. But more than that is the fact that this "campaign" could be taken as an indication that the Student Union elections are indeed, as many claim, little more than popularity contests. While I expect posters to be little more than attention-grabbers, subliminally ensuring that I remember a particular candidate's name (and face), there is a means by which candidates can make their particular beliefs, interests and goals known to the student body - and that means has traditionally been the Election Supplement, published each year in this paper.

This year, of the 48 candidates for the Student Union elections, only 21 actually gave in a submission for publication. I find it very hard to understand why. These submissions are not by any means involved essays requiring extensive research - they are brief "position papers", which state the candidates' names, their areas of study, the reasons for which they are running, and what they hope to achieve in office. Putting together these position papers should in fact be a quick and painless process - for presumably all candidates become consciously aware of the reasons for which they are running when they decide to go through with their nomination. However, although the process seems simple, it is the only means by which students can vote in an informed and reasoned manner, and therefore, the importance of submitting these positions papers is paramount if the students are expected to take these elections seriously at all.

But perhaps it is unfair to place the blame squarely on the candidates' shoulders. It seems that quite a few candidates were unaware that they were able to use the Brunswickan's Election Supplement as a forum for their views. We had candidates wandering into the Brunswickan all week, asking what exactly they were expected to write and whether or not they could get their photos taken. This has effectively meant that the Election Supplement is hardly a balanced representation of the candidates seeking election. This is a far from ideal situation. Another far from ideal situation is the fact that many of the positions are "acclaimed" positions, requiring a yes/no vote. Whether this is the result of limited candidature or an attempt to limit candidature is not exactly clear.

I understand that the people involved in the organization of this year's elections have paid considerable attention to addressing the problem of low voter turn-out. It was apparently felt that one of the causes was that the one day previously granted for actual polling was insufficient. Accordingly, the elections were extended to cover a two-day period. But somehow I feel that this will not significantly address the issue of low voter turn-out. Those students who are inspired to vote will vote whether the elections are held on one day or throughout one week. The real question becomes then that of inspiring the students to vote.

Students will vote if they feel a candidate is interested in achieving what they would like to see achieved on campus. Students will vote if and when they feel that their faculty representatives on the Student Union Council do more than attend tedious weekly meetings whose primary purpose seems to be to quibble over line-items in various budgets and/or to listen to the bigger (but not necessarily better) plans proposed by the members of the Student Union Executive. What elections on this campus are suffering from is an almost utter dearth of forward-looking discussion on issues that students can actually get excited about. I would have thought that the Student Union Elections was the perfect time to raise some of these issues to the public form. Apparently I was wrong.

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