

Candidates very disappointing

Commentary by Richard Watts

Every year students are treated to Students' Union election campaign rhetoric. Most of this rhetoric is empty and meaningless.

To offer voters a clear choice on how to cast their ballots the candidates should say three things when they outline their platforms - unfortunately, none of this year's candidates succeed.

First, the candidates must outline clearly the role and the purposes of the Students' Union. Most students literally have no idea what they would like to see their Union doing on their behalf.

For example, do the candidates think the SU should act as a united political voice for the 24,000 students on campus speaking on issues such as the arms race or abortion? Do the candidates think the SU should be a service organization providing students with, for example, enough bars on campus? Since most students have never considered these questions, and since every year there is a new influx of first year students this question should be answered every year.

After outlining what they believe are the main purposes of the SU the candidates should say in real terms exactly how, if elected, they will fill that role. This is called "making promises."

If the Students' Union fills a political role, the candidates should explain what they intend to do to fill that role. Will they organize protest rallies? Will they start up a letters campaign?

Or, on the other hand, if the candidate says the SU is primarily a service organization, then they should say what services they will improve, cut, or start up. For example, the candidate might promise to build a new bar.

Thirdly, after outlining what they see as the main role of the SU and making specific proposals that will fill that role, the candidate should then provide the voters with a breakdown of their own ideologies, philosophies, and to a certain extent their personalities.

It is difficult, but a candidate should try and be honest about

being a socialist or a conservative. A conservative promising to demonstrate for free and legal abortions would be difficult to take seriously.

More frequently, however, candidates talk about "issues" which have become meaningless pieces of campaign rhetoric through overuse. In fact, "issues" are merely an extension of the SU's stated role and the candidates' campaign promises.

Based on our three criteria, this week's election hopefuls have all performed, in varying degrees, badly.

The only full slate running in the election, the Watts slate, does not mention what they think the SU should or could be - nor do they make any concrete proposals.

The Watts slate says their platform embodies two main themes: "communication and planning." They promise effective two-way communication with students, government, the University Administration and with the general public. "Communication means Accountability" says the Watts Slate.

They do not say exactly what they plan on communicating. They do say they will keep students informed of Student Union activities. They do not say what activities they plan on conducting next year.

Andrew Watts himself says very little. He says the President must take a leading role within the student population.

Who, exactly within the student body is he going to lead, and where is he going to take them? He doesn't say so we can discount that statement as another piece of meaningless rhetoric.

So much for the guys with the ties.

Floyd Hodgins is a newcomer to SU politics. He does not really define what he thinks the role of the SU is, except through criticisms of the present Greenhill executive, and by implication the Watts slate.

He implies that his opponent Andrew Watts is not a "real student" and that he spends his time "rubbing shoulders with the administration."

VP Internal candidate Gord Stamp and his partner VP Academic hopeful Rainer Huebl are taking the same approach as Floyd Hodgins.

Like Hodgins, they fail to define the role to the Students' Union as they see it, except by criticizing the past executives, principally the last two Greenhill executives.

Stamp does promise doors on the bus shelters, to lower the cost of movies in SUB Theatre to a dollar, and an entertainment week, complete with beer gardens, free bands in Dinwoodie, and guest speakers. Stamp and Huebl make many promises, perhaps too many.

Donna Kassian, candidate for VP Academic, like everybody else in this year's election, does not mention the role of the SU.

She does outline a few promises such as a tutoring service and an SU scholarship.

Donna Kassian's literature, like Hodgins', betrays a lack of campaign supporters and a certain lack of campaign experience.

The minimal choice is yours. Just remember: What role do you want your Students' Union to play? What promises have the candidates made towards fulfilling that role? And what are the ideologies of the candidates, and can you trust them?

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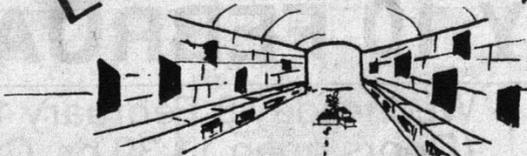
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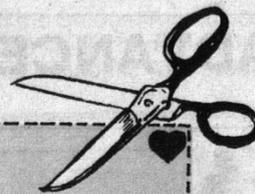
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