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UNIVERSITY

University Democrats are missing from this year's general elections

By Catherine Hawley
Emerald Associate Editor

A confusing and sometimes antagonistic transition has rendered the University Democrats virtually nonexistent in the weeks preceding the general elections.

After severing its ties last June with the Democratic Party of Lane County and changing its name to reflect a progressive, non-partisan orientation, University Democrats — now officially known as Progressive Students Action Committee — has stagnated for lack of leadership, said Therese DuBravac, former University Democrats co-chairwoman.

"(PSAC) does exist; it's waiting for people to see it," DuBravac said. "It needs leadership."

Meanwhile, another student is attempting to revive a campus group to serve the purpose of the former U Dems: to work within the Democratic Party on local, state and national issues.

Don Stull, a senior majoring in rhetoric and communication, said he is in the process of re-registering University Democrats with the ASUO.

However, neither group has been organized in time to participate in election campaigns this fall, a fact that DuBravac said she finds disappointing.

"There are some close races; especially for governor," she said.

Stull agreed it was unfortunate that no Democratic student group was active on campus during the campaign season but said most students interested in party politics have helped out in specific races, either as individuals or as part of groups such as Students for Roberts or Students for Choice.

Stull's University Democrats and the leaderless PSAC are the result of a split with the county branch of the Democratic Party that started about a year ago.

At that time, PSAC was still known as University Democrats and was headed by chairman Robert Kenneth. U Dems members attended monthly planning meetings of the Democratic Party of Lane County and also received "matched funds" from the county party — a dollar for every one the student group raised on its own, up to \$50 a month.

DuBravac said trouble arose after the county organization loaned \$400 to U Dems in September to begin a progressive campus newspaper. However, the final product, *The Student Insurgent*, upset many members of the county Democrats, who called the publication "too radical," DuBravac said.

At the county party's insistence, the *Insurgent* separated from the University Democrats — although both continue to share office space with Catalyst Films in EMU Suite 1 — and Kenneth resigned from University Democrats to devote his time to the new paper.

But even after the *Insurgent's* connection with the Democratic Party was removed and freshman Heather Wright was elected to replace Kenneth, many students believed the more moderate county Democrats continued to discount their "activist" views on issues such as gay and lesbian rights, Central America and abortion, DuBravac said.

The difference in goals between the students and the rest of the party members soon became marked, and arguments became "counterproductive," she said.

After disaffiliating with the county party in June, University Democrats changed its name to PSAC, with the intention of providing an outlet for progressive ideas on campus without regard to party ties.

However, Stull said he was "disheartened" to hear of the name change. He worked last year with the party at the county level, although he did attend a few University Democrats meetings, and from his point of view, the students were moving further away from political participation.

"In some ways (the disaffiliation) left a void when the party needed organization the most," he said.

Stull said he is reviving University Democrats to "take party action rather than engage in philosophical quarreling over the direction of University Democrats."

He said he still believes he is the target of some bitterness stemming from a failed bid for the position of 1990-91 U Dems chairman made last spring, shortly before disaffiliation. But, Stull said he sees no conflict between the revived University Democrats and PSAC.

"No doubt we'll be addressing some of the same issues," he said. "However, we want to provide the necessary action to implement the involvement with as many Democratic leaders as possible."

DuBravac acknowledged that Stull's run for office was resented by some "protective" group members at the time, but she agreed that the two new groups should be able to cooperate, once they're off the ground.

"It would be great if they could work together and co-sponsor some events," she said.

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