

VOTING

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not alone in their apathy.

"I don't think that student elections are much different than any other elections," Melton said. "It's hard to engage young folks in political processes ... I think that if we could learn how to engage students in the political process at large, you would see the trend of voting go way up."

The dangers of low voter turnout

Voter turnout on the University campus is low, and many student government officials and University experts see this trend as a serious problem.

"It's definitely a problem when 17,000 students on this campus are affected by the ASUO, and only a small portion of them realize it," ASUO Elections Coordinator

Stephanie Day said.

University political scientist and survey researcher Joel Bloom said that when voter turnout is low, organized student groups find it easier to elect the leaders that will represent their interests. The problem is those leaders may not represent the interests of the majority.

"The most obvious impact (of low voter turnout) is that organized groups have a big advantage," Bloom said. "That's one of the reasons the greek system has been so successful in ASUO elections."

Some think low voter turnout is not necessarily hurtful to a democracy, however. Bloom said there is one vein of thought in political science that suggests low voter turnout may actually be a good thing, because those who refrain from voting either don't care or aren't educated on the issues or candidates anyway.

But ASUO President-elect Adam

Petkun said it's hard to find a student who doesn't care at all about housing standards or tuition hikes. Also, all students, regardless of their involvement in ASUO programs, have a stake in how their incidental fees are spent.

Petkun said it's easy for candidates to campaign to students involved in greek organizations, club sports, ASUO programs and residence hall inhabitants, because they are the easiest to access in group settings. He agreed with Bloom that this tactic can alienate students not involved in these organizations.

"It's supposed to be a representative government, and it's hard to say that you're representing everyone when only a small number of people turn out to vote," Petkun said.

Contact the campus/federal politics reporter at jaredpaben@dailymerald.com.

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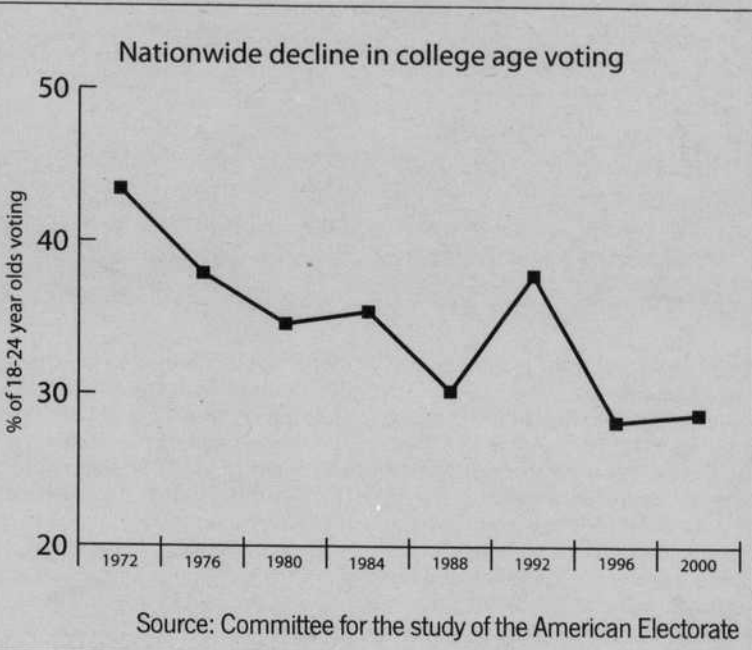
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William Sullivan reads from his book "Cabin Fever: Notes From a Part-Time Pioneer," Browsing Room, Knight Library, 7 p.m.

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