

# NRO

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## VOTERS

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"I think students have a real hard time seeing what student government does for them," Strawn said. "I don't think student government does a good job of having a local direct impact on campus, and I think that's why students don't participate."

ASUO Elections Board Publicity Coordinator Nathan Strauss echoed those sentiments.

"I think it's a lack of knowledge about what's going on — a misunderstanding about how the ASUO affects them," he said.

Strauss also said students see low turnouts and their peers' unwillingness to vote and conclude that voting doesn't matter.

Current ASUO President Maddy Melton said students don't vote because politicians don't represent their interests, but politicians don't represent students because students don't vote.

While University political scientist and survey researcher Joel Bloom agreed that students feel voting is pointless, he pointed to other factors outside ASUO's control. First, he said a lack of partisanship is partly to blame for 10 to 15 percent voting turnouts on many college campuses.

"People, generally speaking, know what parties stand for," Bloom said, adding that without parties, many don't know where candidates stand.

Second, turnouts on campus are low because people tend to vote in places where they feel deep roots, and many students don't see campus as a permanent home, Bloom said.

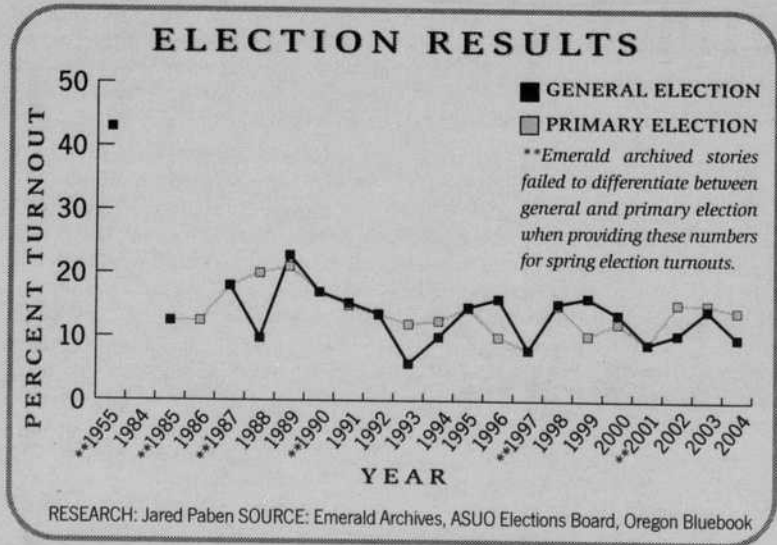
Curtis Gans, 27-year director of the Washington, D.C.-based Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, said there are many reasons young people nationwide avoid the vote. He said it can be blamed on everything from a decline in civic education in schools and newspaper readership to the failure of political parties to mobilize youth. He also cited the erosion of trust in government.

Petkun said some students are just impossible to reach.

"There are a few people that are kind of proud of apathy," Petkun said. But, those people are going to exist everywhere, but it's still important to try and serve them."

### Elusive solutions

Many student government leaders agree that a solution to low voter turnout may come through outreach



programs educating students about the ASUO's importance. But, even then, disagreement exists over who should be doing it.

Elections Board members Stephanie Day and Strauss spent many hours coordinating publicity for this year's elections, but they said that's not enough. They simply can't change students' attitudes about the ASUO in the few months before elections, Strauss said.

Day said the solution rests in the hands of the ASUO president, vice president and ASUO Student Senate.

Strauss agreed, saying ASUO leaders need to reach out to students, but he stopped short of labeling the lack of outreach as a shortfall of past administrations.

"There's only so much flyering and advertisements you can do," Strauss said. "People see it, but you can't force them to vote... That comes from deeper than just publicity. That's going to come

from an administration that makes it a priority to outreach to students, and it takes time for that to happen."

Petkun said voter turnouts are very important to both himself and Vice President-elect Mena Ravassipour. They will help brainstorm ideas for the elections coordinator for increasing voter turnout, but the coordinator is responsible for increasing voter awareness outside of elections season, he said.

But Petkun pointed out that even outreach is not perfect. He knocked on countless doors in Eugene neighborhoods before ASUO elections this year, but even that met with limited success, he said.

Petkun said the solution to low voter turnout is not simple. Even with outreach, it's difficult to reach students, especially those who are not members of groups.

"I guess there is no silver bullet," Petkun said. "We're looking for it, but we don't know what it is."

Contact the campus/  
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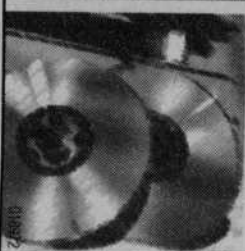
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## Oregon Daily Emerald

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