

Monday, May 3, 2004

EDITORIAL

Voter apathy among youth generation is foreboding

Low turnout of the youth vote — especially in tight races — has long been a sore point for young activists. According to the Washington, D.C.-based Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, voter participation among 18 to 24-year-olds has declined in recent decades. In 2000, only 28.7 percent of people in that age group voted in local, state and federal elections.

But if these numbers point to a disenchanted apathy, student participation in ASUO elections is abysmally depressing. This year, only 14.1 percent of the student body voted in the primary election, and a pitiful 9.9 percent did in the general election.

While this year's participation was significantly better than 1993's all-time low of 5.8 percent, it's still a far cry short of 28.7 percent, and a democratic tragedy compared to 1955's campus voter turnout of some 43 percent.

This apathy, needless to say, is bad for the interests of college students on both the University and national levels.

"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," ASUO President-elect Adam Petkun said.

But on the national scale, where much more than just student interests are in play, from the seeds of apathy grows political disadvantage. Although most of the American public education system needs fiscal and structural reform, it's not a jump to think that higher education has suffered worse than primary and secondary education because parents of elementary and high school students tend to vote, whereas college students often don't.

Who or what is to blame for this flagging participation, at least at the University level? Well, there are at least a couple ideas.

"It's hard to engage young folks in political processes," ASUO President Maddy Melton said. "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."

At least part of the problem lies with the ASUO Election Board's planning. Ignoring a Constitution Court demand that the board carefully schedule this year's elections to avoid a conflict with the law school's Dead Week, and under the duress of technical and bureaucratic problems, the Election Board scheduled primary and general elections in a way that gave candidates scant time to prepare and campaign. Worse, these problems were compounded by an ill-prepared elections packet that was rejected not once, but twice by the Court. That the lack of time for candidates to share their ideas with students left the campus less informed, while simultaneously not helping turnout, is also unacceptable.

To the board's credit, they at least provided pizza at this year's general election presidential debate, which surely would have helped garner interest if any fraction of the student body actually cared.

In any case, get out and vote this November in your local, state and national elections. And if you're among the 90.1 percent of students who didn't vote in this year's ASUO election and aren't graduating, speak your voice and do so next year.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Clipboards, clipboards, go away

You can tell it's spring on campus. Everyone is lying outside on the lawns, girls are wearing obscenely small amounts of clothing and you can't make it from your house to class without being assaulted by someone with a clipboard.

Luckily, we all survived ASUO election season again. The minute the first puffy paint sign showed up, I sighed with a feeling of, "Here we go again." My friends and I used many tactics to avoid the student government street assaults. The easiest option was just to avoid the sidewalks near the EMU Amphitheater. This route usually boiled down simply to swinging wide and cutting across the Collier House lawn. If you were feeling bold enough to stick to the main route, you would ultimately be accosted by someone with a flier about his or her best friend, listing the reasons why the person is such a wonderful candidate. You could take the flier, read it, realize that it has absolutely nothing to say, and then put it in the garbage. Or you could have taken the paper-saving route and rejected the flier. However, this method of avoidance required saying something like, "No thanks. I've already voted."

It's hard to be polite to people who ask you the same question three times in one day. I said "no" on my way to creative writing. Did you really think I would have changed my mind after accounting? But you can't be too hard on the ASUO candidates. I mean, they are only "the voice" of students. They're astounded that voter turnout was low, when most students are astounded at the fact that during all the years they've been at the University, they've never seen an ASUO Executive who has really lived up to his or her campaign platform.

But now that the elections are over, a new evil is rising on campus. The off-campus po-



Marissa Jones
 Cry me a river

litical groups are coming in with their clipboards, taking advantage of pale students trying to enjoy the sun. This past Monday, I sat outside, reading a book on a bench by the EMU East Lawn. Unfortunately, it wasn't the relaxing spot I had hoped for. I had a few close encounters with a Frisbee, which were followed by the clipboard man. He didn't have to talk for long before I explained to him I wasn't registered to vote in Oregon, a comment that stopped him in his tracks. Of course, now I was distracted from my reading, so I watched him walk around gathering signatures from sunbathers, who couldn't have listened to him talk about the petition for more than a minute before signing. It's a "pity signature," really. Sometimes you can't help but feel bad for the person who is willing to walk up to everyone and ask the same question over and over.

After watching him walk around, I did feel bad about how short I was with him. However, my feelings changed after he approached me three more times that same day. By the last time, I was so annoyed that I was ready to start my own petition asking for a dead zone where I could sit on campus and not be bothered.

I shifted to the tables outside the Fishbowl. Here I witnessed something extremely hilarious: The collision of two clipboard

carriers. While I watched a woman trying to convince a student to sign her petition, the previous clipboard man walked up, explaining his petition to the two of them. The first one piped up saying, "Hey, I'm trying to get him to sign my petition here!" The second one apologized and walked away rather dejectedly to the next table. Apparently the clipboard carriers find each other just as annoying as students find them. Who knew?

So how do you effectively combat the clipboard carriers? Well, the best tactic is to come up with a good brushoff. The standard, "I'm not registered to vote in Oregon," may work best, but don't be afraid to have fun with it. Once, when an advocate held up a clipboard to a student saying "Save the whales?," the student replied with, "Sorry, I've already eaten lunch." Needless to say, this comment threw the clipboard carrier off so much that he didn't even have an argument to the student's apathy.

If you take the high road and listen to what they have to say, I suggest you really listen. I have had some very interesting conversations with clipboard carriers before, which made me really think about certain issues, although their arguments still didn't convince me to sign. The point is, don't be bullied into signing something because it's easier than talking. If you don't have the time to talk, then don't sign something you know little about.

As annoying as the evil clipboard carriers are, just remember they wouldn't be out annoying you on the bench if the sun weren't shining. And that alone is enough to overshadow their pestering.

Contact the columnist at marissajones@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous poll and the coming week's poll question.

Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: Do you feel safe walking

alone on campus at night?

Results: 50 votes.

• Yes — The campus is well-lit: 42.0 percent or 21 votes.

• Yes — Public safety is present: 32.0 percent or 16 votes.

• No — Campus is poorly lit: 14.0

percent or 7 votes.

• No — Recent crimes have made me avoid campus at night: 12.0 percent or 6 votes.

This week: Squirrel fishing?!

Choices: Awesome!!!; Cruel!!!; Happy squirrels!!!; Stupid!!!; What is that?!