

**Methods To Increase Student Voter
Turnout For UBC AMS General Elections**

for
UBC AMS Student Campaigners
The AMS Election Administration

by
Zainab Rauf Tramboo
English 301 Student

Aug 17, 2020

CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Abstract

The low student voter turnout rate for the University of British Columbia (UBC) Alma Mater Society (AMS) general student elections over the past few years has profoundly affected the reach and standing of the AMS as a student body. The UBC AMS administration has implemented methods which the student campaigners and AMS administration collaborate on in order to encourage students to vote.

Due to poor communication about the value of student elections and the work done or successful changes made by AMS student leaders, UBC AMS and student campaigners face the challenge of motivating students to vote.

Primary data collected, in the form of surveys guided the analysis of coming up with methods of the increasing the student voter turnout rate. Secondary data extracted from AMS elections data and articles related to student elections helped reveal the cons of low election turnouts.

The UBC AMS administration and student campaigners confronted with unmotivated students should consider the following recommendations:

- Allocating the ending five minutes of university lectures to allow students to vote for the AMS elections through their devices
- Creating videos and innovative interactions on every possible social media platform in order to communicate and connect with students
- Holding on-campus events such as debates between competitors in large and commonly accessible student areas
- Creating packages with data, facts, and analysis about changes made and things achieved by the AMS student body every year
- Setting up multiple ballots in UBC building to allow easy student access
- Encouraging student campaigners to attend campaign training workshops

Introduction

University life is one of the most crucial experiences of young adults. It is university experience that allows young adults to transform into responsible, aware, and cautious human beings. In order to have the perfect university education, taking part in student elections is imperative. Student elections not only let students have a say in their needs and rights but also make them conscious of their surroundings. This makes it crucial for students to take part in student elections.

UBC, pertaining to its high university ranking and large student population, has an established AMS. The AMS represents over fifty thousand students each year over the course of 4-5 years. The executives (student presidents) of AMS ensure that the needs of students are met by the University Administration and the Provincial and Federal governments. However, the persistent low student voter turnout rate in UBC concerns the student wellbeing and the standing of AMS as a student body.

The purpose of this inquiry is to identify the methods to increase student voter turnout for UBC AMS general elections. The goal is to maintain the importance of the AMS student body while ensuring the voice of UBC students is being considered and heard to maintain an enriched university experience.

Surveys were sent out to UBC students, the AMS administration, and the student campaigners to gather primary data for analysis. UBC student and official staff articles on the AMS general elections as well as AMS full official voting results from previous years were used as secondary reference and guidance.

The report concluded with encouraging professors to allocate ending five minutes of their lectures to allow students to vote for the AMS elections via their devices just like students are asked to fill in teaching evaluations in lectures. The data collected also suggested educating students on the importance of voting via videos, pictures, and short social media posts on every possible social media platform. Other important suggestions included, conducting major on-campus events such as debates between competitors in student areas i.e. Student Nest, and having multiple ballots in every possible UBC building based on distance rather than just the number of student visits.

Data Selection

Available facilities

Data collected from voluntary and anonymous surveys indicated facilities that are authorized by AMS administration which are most used by campaigners over 2017-2019 (Figure 1).

The AMS administration currently allows wide-scale marketing throughout campus in terms of posting campaign banners/posters on faculty buildings, gardens, bus stops (after acquiring permission). Student leaders running for elections are also able to say their speeches before or after lectures if professors permit. Campaigners are free to write articles on UBC based news platforms and hold sessions through UBC radio stations. Groups running for elections are allowed access to official UBC social media accounts to advertise and talk about their campaigns and link them to their respective campaign accounts. Students wishing to know about the process of being able to run for elections or seek guidance are encouraged to approach the AMS administration.

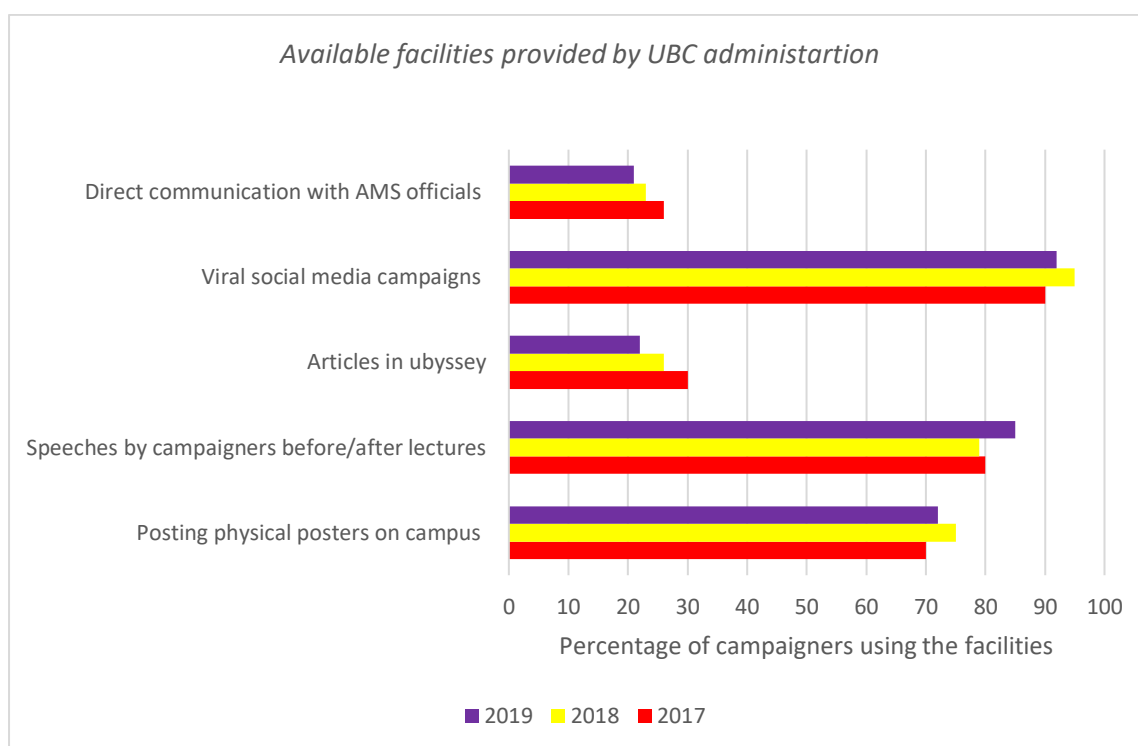


Figure 1: Facilities provided by the AMS for campaigning and how much campaigners use them

The top three facilities used by student campaigners are the ‘viral social media campaigns’, ‘Speeches’, and ‘posting physical posters around campus’. When the results are compared with what students prefer as AMS facilities to be used by campaigners, results were similar.

CAUSAL ANALYSIS

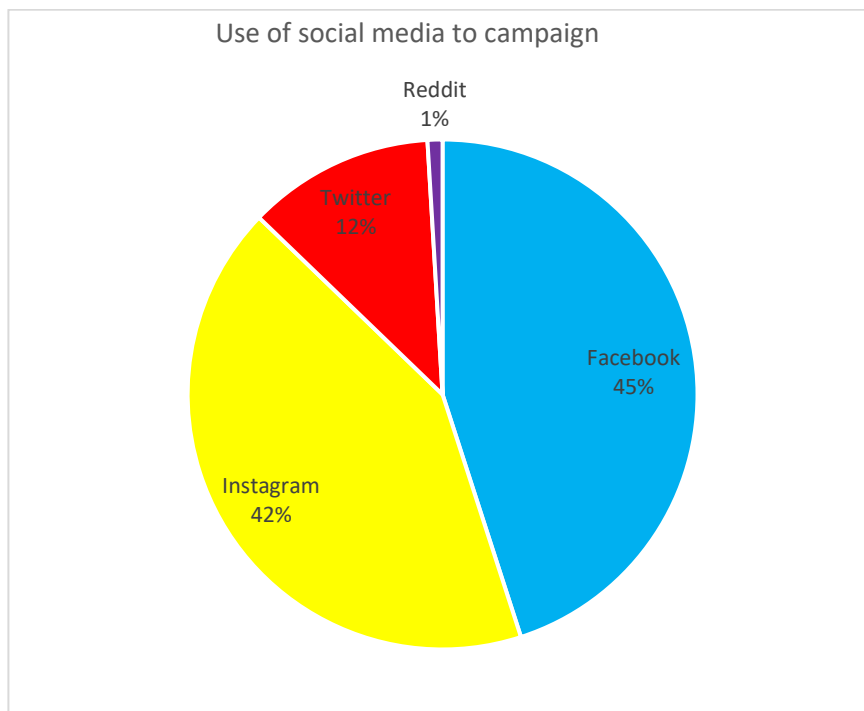
Sources of Communication

This section is divided into two parts: Physical and Virtual.

Physical: According to student surveys, students prefer varied kinds of events to see campaigners running face to face. Students prefer on the spot debates, question answer sessions, and campaigners to be allowed to hold rallies just like in real political elections. Students mainly preferred use of the student nest, great hall, or areas around the waterfall on main mall to hold such events. Moreover, campaigners in their surveys showed similar thinking as the students.

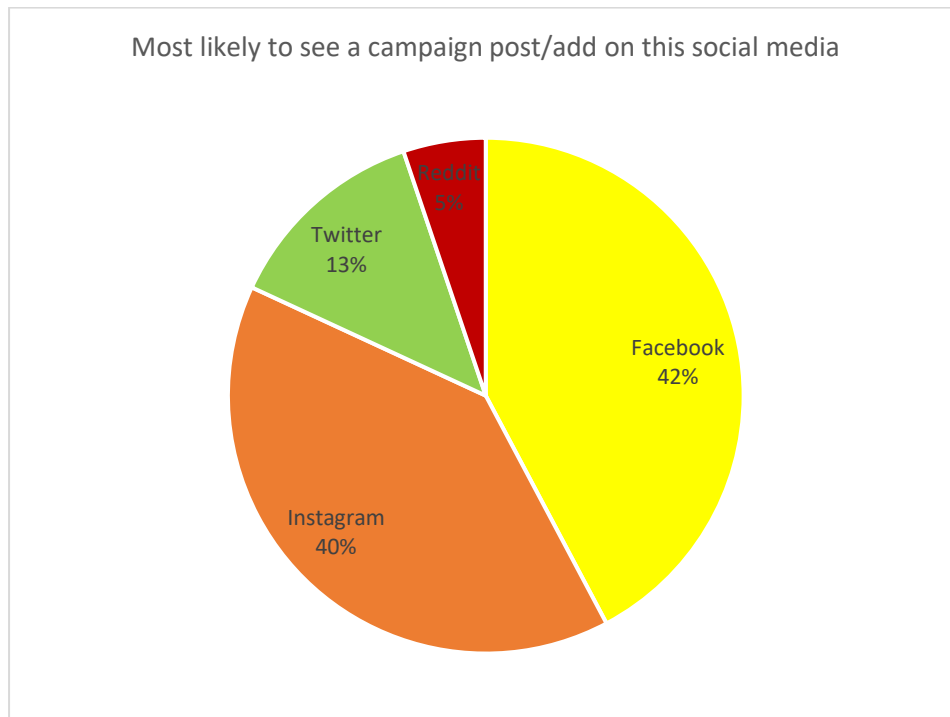
Virtual: Data extracted by surveys indicated both students and campaigners preferring to use Facebook and Instagram to communicate and connect with each other. Campaigners stated use of short videos, online Q&A sessions, and innovative posts to be effective in reaching out to a large audience in an effective way. Students voted that they are most likely to know about or respond to campaigns via content on Facebook and Instagram. Campaigners stated sending mass emails to students through official UBC email IDs would also help remind and motivate students to vote.

Figure 2: Illustrates the use of social media by campaigners for campaigning



CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Figure 3: Illustrates the likeliness of students seeing a campaigning add/post on social media



Workshops

Campaigners and AMS administration both agreed on introducing workshops that teach students how to run an election campaign, how to reach out to students to vote for a candidate, how to make use of resources, and how the administration could provide support to the campaigners.

Annual performance reviews of the AMS student body

One of the key findings of the students surveys was about not knowing how voting for AMS student leaders would better their time at university, what all changes the AMS student leaders can make or what all has the student body achieved previously. Keeping in mind this finding, UBC AMS administration could produce annual performance reviews in forms of online booklets that could be circulate to students via email and social media.

This will allow for accountability as well as raise awareness amongst students about the work and achievements of the AMS student body. It will showcase the importance of the student body and demonstrate reasons for the students to come out to vote.

CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Ways to give multiple voting chances

Student surveys mostly ranked having multiple ballots in every possible UBC building based on distance rather on just the number of student visits as of the utmost importance. Students stated that being reminded about elections every day for over a week through ballot tables would make them more likely to vote. According to survey, seeing ballots and representatives at the ballot box is as important of a reminder to students as getting email or social media updates for voting.

Campaigners stated the importance of allocating the ending five minutes of university lectures to allow students to vote for the AMS elections through their devices. They ranked allowing five minutes of lectures to allow students to vote as the most important method of increasing student voter turnout as it parallels with student submission of teacher evaluations being high due to the same method.

Conflicting Interests

Investing in conducting workshops, hiring the employees, and designing annual performance review packages requires a good enough sum of money to be allocated from the AMS funding. This would also require a lot of organization, planning, and time to be spent on implementing these methods. All of this the AMS administration could not want to go ahead with as it might not prioritize their financial needs due to reasons like the student body getting elected regardless of few votes or many. So, spending on this project might be of necessity.

Similar to the reason above, the student body might not have it in the best of their interest to 'increase' student voter's turnout as they just need to win by any number.

However, reminding the AMS administration and the student body of their larger role in the society of working towards ensuring the well-being of students would counter the above reasons of not implementing the methods mentioned throughout the document.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The UBC AMS is a thriving student society that exists to advocate student viewpoints and ensure the needs of students are met by the University Administration and the Provincial and Federal governments. From student referendums about monthly gym fee to what the writing on the student degree certificates would say, the AMS represents the viewpoint of UBC students to administration. Finding from the surveys indicated need for implementation of new methods to encourage students to vote that mainly revolve around the need to improve the communication gap between the students of UBC and the student leaders of the AMS.

Interpretation of Findings

While UBC AMS have made efforts in encouraging students to come out to vote the results have not been positive. From 2014-2019, student voter turnout has ranged between a low 20-21%. This is like trying to play a basketball game where only one team member shows up. Furthermore, while acknowledging the pandemic, in 2020 the turnout was 11.6%.

Direct and innovate communication with students through every possible physical and virtual platform has been identified as the method students would most likely see as ways of motivating them to vote. Finding ways to ensure students are given multiple chance to vote and are made aware of the importance of voting are methods that need to be greatly worked on. Formalizing workshops for campaigners is agreed upon by majority of the leaders and administrators.

Recommendations

To encourage students to vote for AMS general student elections, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. Allocating the ending five minutes of university lectures to allow students to vote for the AMS elections through their devices
2. Creating videos and innovative interactions on every possible social media platform in order to communicate and connect with students
3. Holding on-campus events such as debates between competitors in student areas
4. Creating packages with data, facts, and analysis about changes made and things achieved by the AMS student body every year
5. Setting up multiple ballots UBC building to allow easy student access
6. Conducting election campaign training workshops for student campaigners

CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Appendices

UBC AMS General Elections Survey (for students)

UBC AMS General Elections Survey (for administration and campaigners)

References

“Vote in the 2019 AMS Elections.” *Student Services*, 18 Mar. 2019, students.ubc.ca/ubclife/vote-2019-ams-elections.

“UBC VOTES 2019.” *AMS of UBC*, 16 Oct. 2019, www.ams.ubc.ca/news/ubc-votes-2019/.

Zhou, Written by Helen. “AMS Works to Increase Student Turnout in Provincial Elections.” *The Ubyyssey*, www.ubyssey.ca/news/ams-campaigns-to-increase-accessibility-of-provincial-elections/.

“UBC VOTES 2019.” *AMS of UBC*, 16 Oct. 2019, www.ams.ubc.ca/news/ubc-votes-2019/.

“Elections & Referendum.” *AMS of UBC*, 4 May 2020, www.ams.ubc.ca/get-involved/elections/.