**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

July 31, 2020

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Abstract

The low student voter turnout rate for the UBC 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 specified methods which the student campaigners and AMS administration collaborate on in order to encourage students to vote.

Due to limited options, high volume of students, and a relatively small staff, UBC AMS and student campaigners face the challenge of motivating students to vote, in order to maintain the voter turnout rate at an acceptable rate of at least 50%.

Primary data collected, in the form of surveys guided analysis of methods of the increasing the student voter turnout rate. Secondary data extracted from AMS elections data and articles related to student elections revealed the causation of factors resulting in 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 student areas
* Setting up multiple ballots 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 its crucial for students to take part in student elections.

The University of British Columbia (UBC) pertaining to its high university ranking and large student population, has an established Alma Mater Society (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. The student presidents of the AMS are elected by the annual AMS general elections, which allows UBC students to democratically vote for the AMS executives and annual referendums.

However, the persistent low student voter turnout rate in UBC concerns the student wellbeing and the standing of AMS as a student body.

The UBC and AMS administration have already implemented numerous methods to increase student voter turnout. However, these existing methods need to be further backed up by more incentives, and new effective methods need to be introduced. Thus, 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 important 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 do gather primary data for analysis. UBC student and official staff articles on the AMS general elections as well as AMS full official voting results for previous years were used as secondary reference and guidance.

The report concluded to encourage 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 on every possible social media platform, having schedules for major an 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 on just the number of student visits.

Data Selection

*Available facilities*

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

The AMS administration currently allows wide-scale marketing throughout campus in terms 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. Campaigners are free to write article on UBC based news platforms and radio stations permit. 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 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

*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 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 posts to be effective in reaching out to a large audience in a effective way. Students agreed to this statement by indicating them most likely to know about or respond to campaigns via 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

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

*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. 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.

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 method to encourage students to vote and the need to decentralize the organizational complexity causing communication gaps between the students of UBC and the student leaders of the AMS as well as the AMS administration.

**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 already greatly implemented. 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:

The report concluded to encourage 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 on every possible social media platform, having schedules for major an 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 on just the number of student visits.

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. Setting up multiple ballots UBC building to allow easy student access
5. Encouraging student campaigners to attend campaign training workshops

Appendices

[*UBC AMS General Elections Survey (for students)*](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15kzHNqKCuYyixutjV5hjf6nY4hNaUkgfweLPDySOGcQ/edit)

[*UBC AMS General Elections Survey (for administration and campaigners)*](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18T4N-lxrGaSinJ3N6VoVsFxMgLCiHLcKIdxBxmPqFXA/edit)

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