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I. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of undergraduate student representation on decision-making bodies at the University of Alberta is adversely affected by vacancies. These vacancies exist for a number of reasons such as midterm resignations but are more recently attributed to issues related to students’ participation in general. Students have identified some of the reasons for this lack of participation to be time involvement, not feeling electable, apathy, and a lack of relevant experience. However, these reasons alone do not represent the entire issue and to gain a better understanding data on vacancies must be introduced.

Through the use of old attendance records, election information and meeting minutes for both Students’ Council and General Faculties Council, accurate data was gathered for the last 10-15 years of both bodies. The vacancy data was then put into several visuals that show the change in undergraduate representative vacancies over time.

It is Discover Governance’s hope that this information will help the reader visualize trends in undergraduate student vacancies and will help to evaluate and improve the representation of all students at the University of Alberta.
2. STUDENTS’ COUNCIL

Introduction to Students’ Council
Students’ Council is the governing body of the University of Alberta Students’ Union that oversees decisions regarding the direction of the organization. Students’ Council has both a general assembly of students from every undergraduate faculty of the University of Alberta and 6 standing committees with members of Students’ Council on them. All of the aforementioned bodies are subject to representative vacancies, however the focus of this report is on the membership of Students’ Council itself. This is a result of Students’ Council having only 2 elections to membership annually while committees elect on an as needed basis.

Composition
Over time the composition of Students’ Council has changed both in quantity and type of representation. Currently, Students’ Council has 32 seats for faculty councilors, 6 seats for executives and the board of governors representative and the faculty distribution has not changed in 5 years. The distribution of seats between faculties has changed in other years based on enrollment numbers but in 2007 the amount of seats available was decreased from 42 to 32 seats. Other important events in the history of Students’ Council membership are that the faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine had a single seat until 2006 when it ceased to be an undergraduate faculty, the Augustana Faculty seat did not exist until 2004 when it became part of the university and the representatives on Council used to include residence association, president of athletics and various other constituent based positions.

Vacancies
In the past 15 years, vacancies on Students’ Council have never exceeded 25 percent of the general assembly, however some faculties are represented significantly less frequently because of unfilled seats. Using data from elections, by-elections and resignations for the past 15 years a graph of the overall percentage of unfilled seats over time was created.
In Figure 2-1 there is a noticeable drop in vacancies in 2007-2008, which is from the reduction of Students’ Council seats from 42 to 32. The reduction of seats on Students’ Council has improved the reduction of vacancies over time, which is evident as vacancies are stabilized at around 12% post by-election at this point. The stabilizing of vacancies shows that by-elections are effective in most years, and are a useful operation of the Students’ Union. Another conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that there is currently a limit to the effectiveness of filling Students’ Council. A minimum number of vacancies on council of 5 percent or about 2 seats exists in the data and is a barrier in the goal of achieving one hundred percent filled Students’ Council.

It is also important to note that the data before 2004 is inaccurate and extrapolated in some places due to records being inaccessible. In addition to this, the seat changes as noted in the introduction effect what the percentages represent from 2000-2006 relative to current years.

**Breakdown**

Students’ Council has representation from all 15 of the University of Alberta’s undergraduate faculties. From the data gathered it is clearly seen that some faculty seats are significantly harder to fill than others. To illustrate this, a graph was made comparing faculties in the percent of the last 5 years that they have gone without vacancies.
Percentage of Years of Students’ Council with No Vacancies (2009 – 2013)

(Figure 2-2 Percent of Council Years With No Vacancies Over 5 years)

In Figure 2-2 it is shown that some faculties were completely represented every year for the past 5 years. Despite the effective filling of some faculties’ seats, there are several faculties that are of concern for repeatedly not filling seats. For a broader picture of this, the average percentage of seats vacant in each Students’ Council faculty seats over 5 and 10 years was put in a visual to compare.

Average Percent of Students’ Council Seats Vacant (2004 – 2013)

(Figure 2-3 Average Percent of Faculty Specific Seats Vacant)

In Figure 2-3, the trend of the data is consistent with Figure 2-2 and the 10-year range specifically shows the effect of the reduction of the number of seats on council. In addition, from this point of view, by-elections seem, on average, to mostly marginally increase or maintain the number of filled seats on council.
Resignations

Students’ Council has always been subject to the resignation of its members. In order to find out if resignations have a correlation to the faculty a councilor is in, a figure was created comparing total and normalized resignations in all faculties.

(Figure 2-4 Resignations in Students’ Council)

With solely the data on resignations over the last 10 years it appears as if there is some faculties with an issue with resignations. However, if the number of resignations is normalized with the average number of seats, it shows that resignations are consistently around the same frequency in all of the faculties in Students’ Council. This draws the final conclusion that currently issues with vacancies are not centric to resignations, and the amount of resignations currently is acceptable.
3. GENERAL FACULTIES COUNCIL

Introduction to GFC
The General Faculties Council is one of the highest governing bodies of the University of Alberta. It is given its authority through the Alberta Post Secondary Learning Act and is subject to the authority of the Board of Governors in its many decisions. The General Faculties Council has the power to approve the University’s Academic Plan, academic programs, academic policies, academic awards, the University Calendar and to grant degrees.

The General Faculties Council has 10 standing committees, however the undergraduate membership on them is either Students’ Union Executive, or appointed students at large so the focus of the data will be on students elected to the general council of the body.

Composition
On the General Faculties Council alone, students have as much as one third of the vote, but undergraduate seats have been consistently not filled for the last 10 Years. There are 158 total seats currently on the General Faculties Council, in which 40 seats are undergraduate student seats. The remaining seats are filled by graduate students, administrators, deans, professors, librarians and both academic and non-academic staff. Evident by the sheer voting power that students have on the General Faculties Council filling vacancies is in the best interest of all students and stakeholders in any decision made at the University of Alberta.

Vacancies
Data was collected on appointments to the General Faculties Council from 2000-2013, however resignations were not included in the data analysis due to their difficulty to track. The data on vacancy percentage was then taken and graphed from 2000-2014 however it is important to note that the data before 2005 is inaccurate as the distribution of seats was not available.
Figure 3-1 shows over time vacancies have generally increased despite there being the same number and a similar distribution of seats. These vacancies seem to consistently fall around 25% of all seats, which is equivalent to approximately 10 undergraduate student seats annually. Recently, the vacancy percentage has come closer to half of all of the undergraduate seats, which is significant and approximately 13% of all of the GFC seats.

**Faculty Breakdown**

The 40 seats on the General Faculties Council are proportionally assigned in a way similar to Students’ Council except there is no open studies representation. The data on years without vacancies during the last 5 years was put into a visual to compare the effectiveness of by-elections and to identify which faculties have a poor filling of seats.
In Figure 3-2, it is shown that in the last 5 years, the faculty of Education has never completely filled its’ General Faculties Council seats and some other faculties have had consistent poor filling of seats. In addition to this, it is visualized that in the last 5 years, there has not been one faculty that has had its seats filled fully every year.

To compliment Figure 3-2, another graph was made comparing the faculties’ vacancy percentage in both the last 8 and 5 years.

From the data, it follows the trend of the previous figures in showing the average frequency of vacancies in the General Faculties Council as quite high, reaching 60% or more in nearly a third of the represented faculties.
ENDNOTES


