

# Trustee 'elections' a farce until student votes count

**O**n March 3, 1995, students went to the polls to select which students would represent them as Student Government officers. In particular, we were allowed to select one of six students for student trustee.

Student trustee is easily the most important of all the SG positions. Not only is the student trustee allowed access to the board of trustees meetings, where the direction (and funding) of the university is discussed, but the student trustee is allowed to vote. The student trustee is supposed to represent student concerns to the board of trustees.

I voted for senior George Demetriades, as did 43 percent of the voting population. His closest competition only got 24 percent of the vote.

Oddly enough, Demetriades isn't the student trustee. The position is currently filled by junior Joy Vermillion, who got only 20 percent of the vote, and third place.

She got the third most votes. She also got the fourth fewest votes. I don't see Steve Forbes representing the Republicans this fall, and Paul Tsongas definitely didn't head the Democratic ticket in 1992.

The student trustee is "elected" every two years. Potential candidates for the position are reviewed by SG, who selects up to six for the general election. Students then vote for one of six candidates.

**The current system for electing the student trustee is no election at all. It is merely a test to see if the student body agrees with the SLC.**

Then comes the tricky part: the top three vote-getters go to the Student Life Committee. The SLC then decides which candidate to nominate as the student trustee. That candidate goes to the board of trustees for final approval.

SG should have the power to nominate candidates. They are, after all, our elected representatives. The trustees should be able to approve or deny a candidate, just as they would for any other potential trustee.

The problem comes with the SLC exercising what is, in effect, a veto over an election. The SLC is not elected. Nor is it representative of the student body.

The SLC arrives at its decision considering a number of factors. One of these factors is the results of the election. One would hope that students use the "other factors" in arriving at their choice.

The student input in the process is essentially irrelevant. Choosing one candidate of six where only three candidates are weeded out means that one's vote is disregarded, due to the lack of the ballot being able to decisively determine who fills the trusteeship.

**JOSEPH DOBNER**

STUDENT COLUMNIST

Choosing three of the candidates is similarly ineffective, as it assumes that a student is impartial toward all three. Ranking the candidates is also a false choice, as voters can only say that they think this person should or shouldn't be in office. Ranking does not say that the voters are five-sixths for the person running, and one-sixth against.

What's more, this system tacitly discourages candidates from going door-to-door and meeting the students that they hope to represent. After all, only finishing in the top half of the field is necessary. It is sufficient for winning the position, however, only to convince the SLC that you are the one for the job.

The SLC has its way of determining the right person. Namely, it reviews each candidate's resume and application. It also considers the student vote and the candidates' proposed solutions for campus problems.

At the time of the selection, the big proposed solution was the Plan for the Class of 2000 and its codicil, the computer proposal. Vermillion supported it. Demetriades opposed it.

A large plurality of the student body supported Demetriades and opposed the computer proposal. Apparently, having the "correct" opinions scores big with the SLC. If the system continues as it has, the notion of students having direct input to the board of trustees on major issues is laughable.

One could argue that Vermillion has done a good job, despite her not having been elected by either majority or plurality. We have no way of determining that, as the minutes of the board are sealed. We do know that Vermillion supported the Plan for the Class of 2000 and the gates proposal, both of which were opposed in whole or in part by a majority of the student body. She will probably have an excellent resume and many glowing recommendations from the powers that be.

Should Vermillion decide to take a stand opposing an administrative recommendation (and she may already have, again, the records are sealed) she would not be able to speak from the authority of a duly elected representative of the student body.

The trustees do in fact own the university. It is theirs to dispose of as they please. The student trustee position exists by their choice.

However, having an election of any sort means that the governing body trusts that the voting populace has enough wisdom to make an informed choice (and to elect does mean to choose) of a person to represent them. To hold an election and then to ignore the results is insulting at best and dishonest at worst.

The current system for electing the student trustee is no election at all. It is merely a test to see if the student body agrees with the SLC. The "election" is a farce, and should be made binding or be abolished.



# Cultural pride important

**A**s we enter into this season of Thanksgiving and special holiday celebrations from Diwali, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Lovefeast to Christmas, perhaps this is a timely occasion for us all to reflect on the meaning of this season and what it takes to live, study or work in a culturally diverse community.

Theoretically, this should be a time where we can come together to honor and celebrate the richness of the many different cultural traditions we bring with us to the university.

But before the celebration can begin, we must also be aware of what inhibits us from not only honoring ourselves but also those who are different from us.

In my attempt to keep up with all of the latest discussions on cultural diversity at the university, sometimes it can be mind-boggling. It seems to me that almost every campus group from students, faculty, staff and the administration have a vested interest in being "pro-active" and responsive in addressing issues afflicting those who view and experience the university as a "chilly climate."

While this is good, to echo the concerns of student leaders who attended the recent Presidents' Leadership Conference, why is it that from year to year, we still find ourselves talking about the same issues and still developing the same plans?

Equal to this, we also seem to be fairly adept in deflecting our responsibility to act on such plans, either by blaming someone or something else for what we are sometimes afraid to act on.

Case in point: Shorty's and the now infamous Game Room. Why is it that I find I must continually justify why I am protecting the interests of a "minority" group (in this case the users of the Game

**JOANNA IWATA**

GUEST COLUMNIST

Room), in light of what I am told the "majority" of students want? Where and when does the minority voice factor into who it is we are here to serve and represent?

Thankfully, exceptional student leaders do emerge. It was sophomore Jen Steinberg, the Student Government Chief of Staff who recently approached me at the Presidents' Leadership Conference to apologize for the unfair criticism I have received regarding the new Game Room. Her act of compassion garnered my deepest respect.

Personally, I have always believed that in order to be an effective leader, one must be able to discern the difference between when to act and when to be quiet, honoring a more natural way to emerge which in itself can be very powerful. I also believe that the source for the most meaningful social change in the communities we live and work in does not lie external to us but within us.

If we can, at some level, put away the political agendas for awhile, all the talk and all the blaming, can we actually find a way to "strengthen our community" through our acts of courage and compassion? And if so, how do we address this matter when there are still those among us who cannot be heard or whom others override so that we are not heard?

Going one step further, are we also prepared to look closer within ourselves to actively address what it is that either serves to bring us together or separate us even further?

If we are, can we recommit ourselves to promoting the kinds of changes which will make this a more "tropical" versus "chilly" climate for all groups?

As the holidays are quickly approaching, perhaps this presents to all of us an opportunity to capture the essence of what celebrating our diversity is all about, and moreover, what it will require from us. Progress, of course, never comes to us fast enough but it does come incrementally as illustrated by the following Taoist insight (thank you Master Ni).

In examining the relationship of man with nature, how often do we find ourselves open to accepting a natural process which emerges between the two? In our rush to get things done, how easy is it for us to sit and enjoy the apricots which fall from the trees so naturally?

Certainly, at the university we can continue to push forward various initiatives to address cultural diversity. This effort, though, in my mind goes beyond our relying solely on what certain offices, student groups and academic departments can do for us. And it also goes beyond just addressing one facet of the issue such as race relations at the university.

The realm of higher learning I am focused on lies in both the quality and nature of our daily interactions with each other. How do we "choose" to honor ourselves and each other? Can we agree to disagree? Can we find the balance of knowing when to act and when "to be"?

May we all, during this holiday season, try to enjoy the diversity of apricots we do have which comprise our community — whether they be big ones, small ones, yellow, brown or gold ones. As we do, let us recommit ourselves to planting the seeds from this fruit in fertile ground, where it can grow and someday become big and strong enough to bear fruit enough for everyone.

Joanna Iwata is the director of the Benson University Center.



# Sprained ankle creates problems

**L**ast week, I made a dumb move and I suffered a bad sprain playing basketball in my Health and Exercise class. Because of this, I was treated to one of the most miserable experiences of my life, hobbling around campus. However, I think I can find something good in it.

After spraining it, I made my way over to Student Health Services. I've visited there so many times, they have a special room reserved just for me. I think the receptionists even know me by name.

There I was treated to several doctors showering me with attention, all unwanted. Finally the diagnosis — severely sprained ankle. No sports for 10 days. I tried to get out of the office on my own two feet, but one of the doctors stopped me and said, "I think you should take some crutches."

So I did. I figured that it wouldn't be a big deal. I'd hop around campus, gathering sympathy from total strangers, have people bring me food and relax some. It would be like a vacation, almost.

You can probably tell that I had never been on crutches before. Sure, it was easy walking around Health Services, but campus was another story.

The walk from there to my dorm on South campus was the longest one in my life. I consider myself in pretty good shape, but I had to stop over a dozen times to catch my breath and give my arms a break.

That walk took me over a half

**KYLE HADEN**

STUDENT COLUMNIST

hour. I thought I was going to die.

Dinner was the next problem. My friends decided that they would walk really slowly so that I could keep up. Unfortunately, they also decided to take the longest route imaginable, and the one that involved the most stairs. I fell three or four times.

By this time the novelty of my new toys were rapidly wearing off. When we finally got to the Pit, I had to sit and wait for someone to bring me my food. I felt totally helpless.

Things only got worse. I hopped into my 9:30 a.m. class the next day, five minutes late. Everyone was quiet watching me hop to my seat in the back. I was so tired from the walk over that I fell asleep in class.

I went to my 1:30 p.m. class, where the same thing happened. I decided it wasn't worth it, so I skipped my Friday classes and stayed in my room. This led to another problem. I was bored.

I sat in my room and tried to study (as my father had helpfully suggested I do when I called him with the news), but I couldn't concentrate on anything but my sore arms and my throbbing ankle. The fact that I could not run or go lift weights was frustrating enough, but not being able to go get my own lunch really ticked me off. It was very interesting to see people's reactions to my injury. My friends usually asked me what happened.

I seriously considered making a sign and hanging it around my neck with my story, or distributing leaflets as I trudged around.

Everyone called me cripple, and thought it was so funny. It may have been the first time, but it definitely wasn't after the 99th.

Strangers were even more interesting. Most people would break their necks to hold a door open for me, but when it came to hobbling up any stairs, everyone raced to get ahead of me.

Another interesting thing is that no one wanted to make eye contact with me as I walked along; perhaps they were afraid that my sprain was infectious. So much for southern hospitality. We won't even talk about what happened at the football game; I really don't feel like reliving it.

So what did I learn from all of this? First of all, your legs are definitely the most important part of your body. I'm wearing an ankle brace the rest of my life.

Secondly, this campus is not handicapped-accessible. Although the ramps are all around somewhere, they are in inconvenient spots. If you don't have a car, you are really in trouble. A note to Student Government, this is a topic you might be able to do something about.

Third, people who aren't your friends only care if it doesn't cause them any extra inconvenience. Don't worry, step-racers, when you guys are all on crutches, I'll make sure to push you aside so I can get to class on time.

