

Dear UNBC Undergraduates,

From the Chartwells food services contract to the closing of the pub, students here at UNBC are passionate about many issues. As a liberal post-secondary school, many times our students participate in activism based initiatives, like standing with Local 40 union for higher wages for cafeteria staff and initiating a divestment campaign for UNBC's investments. Yet when it comes to getting into the gears of our system, and in that way making meaningful change, our students are absent. Yet again, our current student elections for representatives are in every situation by acclamation, or even worse left unfilled. That means that those responsible for making decisions such as keeping the Thirsty Moose Pub open or not, have not had to argue an opinion. Who knows if this year those "elected" will keep the Pub open, or challenge the food services contract or anything, because we never got to press them on those issues.

The Chartwells contract, current president Dan Week's re-hiring, and the Chancellorship of James Moore are all up for review by the Board of Governors; all decisions I am sure we can agree student voices are needed in. Yet this year, there will be no election for the undergraduate student rep, only one individual ran for the position. The same is true of the Undergraduate Senate positions where six people have run for six positions.

It is inarguable that 99% of tangible changes affecting students here at UNBC are made through the systems of beauracracy and crafted directly by those who sit at the table. While undergraduates at UNBC seem willing to walk the picket line, we fail where it really matters, in the ballot box.

It is hard to say that these individuals actually have the democratic legitimacy to call themselves student representatives when no one has challenged them. Fundamentally, democracy and its systems, such as they exist here at UNBC, are only effective and responsive to popular needs and issues if those filling the positions have to earn their place. If a government runs unopposed how then how can it profess to be the chosen representatives when no other option was offered? Will these people be able to call themselves "elected" when all it has been is a rubber stamp process?

Winning by acclamation in various student representative positions robs those appointed of any democratic mandate and forces us to consider if their roles are still relevant.

A call for action is useless unless the voice calling is willing to be an active participant in that actionable change. I hoped to see students go farther than a Facebook post and to nominate themselves as a champion of students and seize this opportunity to face UNBC administration and the PG community to advocate for positive changes. As students we are a unique stakeholder group with significant ability to effect all aspects of student experience from future academic programming and course offerings to budgeting on renovations and the future direction of our school.

While I recognize that this statement does not encapsulate those working in advocacy positions outside of student representatives at UNBC, I must reply that working in student government or as a student representative is one of the easiest and yet most impactful ways to make change in our community. If these positions are falling vacant or apathetically run, how can we suggest that we deserve better. Further to that point, when a representative who is elected without competition speaks to administration they lack democratic legitimacy. Is this person really representing our community, are they really our "elected" spokesperson, or as I see it, they were the only person to throw their name in the hat. This is not meant to undermine the work of past representatives. Counter to my point, I will say that Kasandra Mae in her roles as both Women's and Aboriginal Rep. has been, in her over two years on the NUGSS board, an inspiring peer leader and we are lucky to have had her serve on NUGSS. But that's exactly it, we were lucky that she ran, that she held that torch and used it to work for students and our community. Equally likely however is the event where someone not nearly as inspired and dedicated fills the position at the apathy of students, leading to, at best, an ineffectual job done, at worst, a person who argues everything counter to the benefit of students. Can we call upon administration and others to be better in any number of issues if we are not willing to participate?

We recognized at one point as a liberal society the need for "affirmative action" based positions for marginalized or less advantaged groups in our universities and governments. For example, here at UNBC, the Aboriginal and Women's representatives have been created to ensure that those voices have a place in discussion on many important decisions. Yet when it comes to UNBC's undergraduates stepping up to fill these positions, we are nowhere to be seen. This brings into question the need for such positions. Why have a women's or aboriginal representative position if those groups seem apathetic to their fulfillment?

This year, NUGSS board elections, as of the deadline on February 19, had no candidate for aboriginal rep, international rep or accessibility rep and only one for the women's, and LGBTQ rep positions. In fact, for at least the past 5 years both the women's and aboriginal rep positions with NUGSS have been vacant or won without contest. Maybe now we can say that these groups no longer need racial, gender or sexually separated representation?

Perhaps we can remove all student aboriginal and women's representative positions here at UNBC. Based on the apathetic contest for these positions its clear to see those identifying as part of these groups don't feel there is any need to fill that position. I am cynical to think that we have alleviated all challenges facing these groups but maybe I am wrong.

Some will argue that activism and progressive change is best made by subverting the system rather than engaging in it. Recognizing that these colonial systems have a very real, and all recent record of oppression and assimilation, does not necessitate our "unsubscription" from them. Instead I would say that by recognizing this view it should further motivate us to engage in, so as to evolve, the bureaucracy. If you feel that today's systems have elements of oppression or colonial sentiment in them, as a modern citizen, you are bound to seek to change that. By choosing to not get involved you make a decision far worse than apathy, you in fact, choose the side of the oppressor.

Unless students are willing to get up and put their name forward here at UNBC, we don't deserve to be critical of any decisions made, from who is our food service provider to who is our Chancellor. As a soon-to-be former director of NUGSS I am tired of begging students to get involved, to sit on committees or to run for office. If you don't step up, sit down. If this letter has lit a fire in you, use it, get involved, ask questions, scrutinize and advocate for a better UNBC and Prince George because no one else is going to do it for us!

Respectfully from one of your own,



Seth Jex

Open Letter to the Student Body

Student Apathy:

Step Up for Election or Sit Down

I wish to make it clear that I am not critical of any individual and that I believe all those who have put themselves up for election are doing so for noble causes. I wish them the best of luck in their endeavors