

City pulls McMaster polling station

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The city has yanked its poll from McMaster University because of voter apathy.

In the 2006 municipal elections, the city held two days of enumeration and a full day of polling on campus. Only 10 votes were cast.

But Joe Finkle, McMaster Students Union vice-president, education, is trying to change that. He's spent months trying to drum up student interest in the municipal election and is hoping to convince the city to change its mind.

He says the city's decision sends a message that it doesn't care about students.

"I'm under the impression that you can't put a price on democracy. Ten votes is still 10 votes," he said. "It's confirming a lot of students' views that politics leaves them behind and doesn't concern itself with their needs."

But Tony Fallis, the city's elections manager, says any poll in the city that attracted only 10 votes would be shut down. McMaster is no exception.

"Due to this obvious voter apathy it was decided to channel those resources into other election projects," Fallis said.



POLLING STATION: JOE FINKLE MCMASTER UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNION VICE-PRESIDENT IS ANGRY THAT THERE IS NO VOTING STATIONS PLANNED FOR ANYWHERE ON THE MAC CAMPUS. CATHIE COWARD/THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Over the past several months, Finkle has lobbied election officials for an on-campus polling station. He's also running a campus-wide campaign to advertise the election, complete with posters, postcards, and ads on coffee cup sleeves sold at the university café.

Finkle argues that McMaster students, especially first-year students who live in residences and don't know Hamilton very well, aren't likely to head off campus to cast their votes. However, he says he's trying to emphasize the importance of city politics to the student body.

"We've been referring to municipal government as sort of like your mom. It takes care of the little things you might not think about," he said.

Finkle is organizing a walking group on Oct. 25 to help students find their way to nearby polling stations at Binkley United Church and Dalewood Middle School. McMaster is also hosting a mayoral debate next week to help students with their decision. So far, both Mayor Fred Eisenberger and former Mayor Larry Di Ianni have targeted students in their election campaigns – Di Ianni with a policy plan aimed at retaining students after graduation and Eisenberger with a booth at frosh week.

But despite Finkle's campaign, Fallis says it's too late for the city to add a poll at McMaster. He says previous student governments have also tried to convince students to vote and haven't been successful.

"To me it shows more of an apathy on the students' part," he said. "It certainly wasn't a decision lightly taken."

The city has also pulled the plug on its poll at Mohawk College. However, since Mohawk students will be on a fall reading week on election day, they won't be affected by the city's decision, said Kat Cullen, president of the Mohawk Students' Association.

Fallis says the city will revisit the decision about polling stations at Mac and Mohawk for the 2014 election. However, Fallis says he'll need to see many more than 10 students at the polls.

"We're going to need some positive reinforcement."

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