Two years ago, I was a student in my third year at McMaster. I strolled through the Student Centre and was met with flag waving, community members and students yelling at each other, along with security and police involvement in what I thought was supposed to be a discussion. That supposed dialogue quickly descended into conflict and intimidation. Although circumstances on this campus have since changed, I felt a combination of confusion and intrigue surrounding the complexities of IAW. The unfortunate truth however, is that those who are genuinely interested in educating themselves on the issues of Middle Eastern politics still feel intimidated in seeking out this information at IAW events.

Last week, after a meeting of the President’s Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC), a University body charged with upholding and promoting the values of inclusivity, an information session was held by the office of Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES). The purpose of the presentation was to help clarify the University’s stance on the IAW and provide some guidance for the events to come. The fallout I witnessed two years ago to that day, became a cold and closed session. Credit goes to the students at that table that day, who were personally involved in the discussion. That supposed dialogue doesn’t present an inviting environment where the only people who are attending the events are the ones who are personally involved in the discussion.

As you can imagine, the type and tone of the discussion occurring doesn’t present an inviting environment for those who wish to learn. I personally support dialogue on the issues of government and policy, but I feel as though I can’t attend any event out of fear of being labeled “anti-Semitic” or “Zionist.” I am not alone in this opinion. Many students feel intimidated for the same reasons, when all they want to do is educate themselves on the plurality of issues IAW presents. The general campus does not have the privilege of knowledge that the well-established ideological camps have, and that’s problematic when trying to administer a week of discussion and dialogue.

My intention in writing this piece is not to denounce the events of this week in any way, or take sides in this debate. Let me be very clear - I am interested in educating myself on the issues of Middle Eastern politics. Instead, people are personally involved in the discussion. We must understand these events and issues closely. As you can imagine, the type and tone of the discussion occurring doesn’t present an inviting environment where the only people who are attending the events are the ones who are personally involved in the discussion. That supposed dialogue doesn’t present an inviting environment where the only people who are attending the events are the ones who are personally involved in the discussion.

Do you have what it takes? 

The Valedictorian selection process is administered collaboratively between the MSU and the various faculties. Both students and faculty members sit on the selection committee. Having gone through the process before, I can tell you convincingly that we don’t just look at marks when considering Valedictorians.

To be Valedictorian, we’re looking for a student that is the best fit to represent the qualities of the graduating class. Now, what you do in the classroom makes a difference, as you have to provide at least one academic letter of reference. Take note of the fact though, that we do not require a copy of your transcript. We only require proof that you hold a 7.0 cumulative average across your years of study.

The reason for this is simple, there are so many more ways to make a difference at McMaster than doing well on essays and tests. The selection committee will be looking for evidence that you’ve been involved on campus life, have public speaking skills and most importantly, have demonstrated leadership in your time at McMaster. At a school with so many leaders, it’s likely that there are multiple valedictorian spots available. Each faculty selects a Valedictorian, with the exception of Social Science and Science, who select two.

To run, you’ll need to find an undergraduate student to nominate you, as well as one faculty member, dean, associate dean, student of your graduating class, or the Vice-President (Academics) of the University. You’ll need to submit an academic and a work or volunteer-related reference letter, as well as your CV.

It sounds like a lot I know, but it’s important to keep in mind that we want to know what kind of person are you. Valedictorian isn’t just an award, it’s a responsibility. Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Nomination forms are available on the MSU website (msu.mcmaster.ca > Student Affairs > MSU > Council > Selection Process). Nomination packages are due in your faculty office by Friday, March 12th at 5pm.

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