

Identity Matters 3

Gender and Student Leadership, 1908-2023

Prepared by: UASU Department of Research and Advocacy

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Scope and Mandate

This report ('IM3') follows three primary reports on selected equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) factors in student leadership participation:

- [Identity Matters! A Study of Undergraduate Involvement and Leadership in Student Government at UAlberta](#) ('IM1' — September 2017).
 - IM1 focused on gender, primarily the underrepresentation of women in student leadership.
 - The IM1 research led to the development of the Stride leadership development program.
- [Identity Matters 2: Ancestral Diversity and Aboriginality](#) ('IM2' — September 2019)
 - As mandated in the [2019 ARRC Recommendations](#), IM2 focused on the underrepresentation of Indigenous people and visible minorities in student leadership, recognizing the intersection of gender.
 - The ARRC Recommendations and IM2 research led to the development of the Indigenous Leadership Program (ILP).
- The Seeking Student Leadership Roles chapter of the [2020 Annual Survey Report](#) (April 2021).
 - This survey analyzed interest and participation in seven specific types of student leadership roles, sharing the IM1 and IM2 focuses on gender and Indigenous students. This data informed ongoing leadership programming and affirmed its importance.
 - It also established that cisgender women, transgender students, and non-binary students were just as likely as cisgender men to be interested in pursuing all types and levels of student leadership roles, and that Indigenous students were just as likely as settler students to be interested as well.

Since these projects, the UASU has developed additional data sources that cast new light on the core questions of IM1. The IM3 project has been commissioned with a mandate to reexamine participation in student leadership with a particular focus on gender and especially gender diversity.

IM3 draws from the following newly-developed sources:

- The 2023 Annual Survey, which repeats and augments the 2020 survey questions, and collects statements on impacts and factors particular to the IM3 project, comparable to portions of IM1.
- A review of formal speaking turns in Students' Council meetings over the past year.



- A list, exclusively from primary sources (e.g. electoral records, newspaper quotes, and UASU Green and Gold yearbooks), of over 500 individuals who served as UASU Executives since 1908.
- Information on Students' Council composition wherever sources (i.e. electoral records, yearbook lists, or term-long attendance records) are available.
- Revisited analysis of the raw data from relevant questions in the 2014 Annual Survey.
- A list of all committee chairs back to 2011/12.
- A review of all Stride participants, charted against a list of candidates for UASU elections (Council, Executive, and GFC) since Stride began, supplemented by a survey of past participants.
- A January 11-15 survey, n=744, assessing interest in specific General Election and Council positions leading up to the release of General Election nomination packages.

These sources support a set of recommendations aimed at ensuring that women and gender-diverse students encounter fewer barriers when seeking and holding student leadership roles at the University of Alberta.

This work was conducted by members of the UASU Department of Research and Advocacy and Department of Governance (Jonathan Olfert (Director of Research and Advocacy), Cameron McCubbing (Research Analyst), Courtney Graham (Asst. Manager, Governance Support), and Shakur Zein (Research Analyst)) between Summer 2022 and Winter 2024.

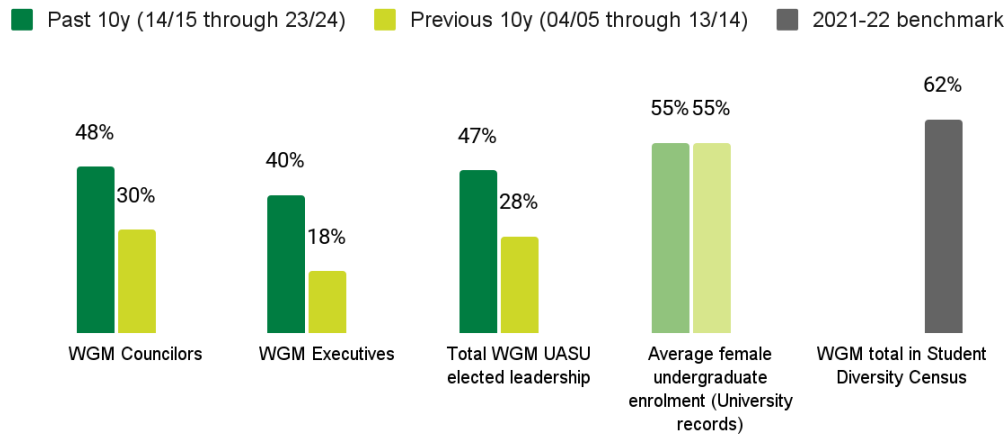
We are grateful for substantial assistance at various stages from colleagues across several UASU departments (notably Kristin LaGrange, Nicole De Grano, Nichole Mertick, Michelle Kim, Chris Beasley, Kelsey Zaruk, Juliana du Pree, Pedro Almeida, Ellen Salter, and Christian Zukowski) and the support of the 2022/23 and 2023/24 Executives, as well as anonymized input from past and current members of Students' Council. We are also grateful to authors of historical books and articles that informed our primary source research in Chapter One (notably Ellen Schoeck, Ursula McFadyen, and Linda J. Quiney), and to the thousands of students (including hundreds of transgender and/or non-binary students) who participated in our consultation surveys.

Overview

Chapter One: Gender in UASU Leadership Through History

- For the UASU's first half-century, women's representation in student leadership was roughly consistent with their proportion of the student population, but generally only in roles (e.g. Vice President) that were earmarked for women.
- While major mid-20th-century reforms gave women more opportunities to pursue a wider range of elected offices, including the Presidency, gender representation in leadership did not keep pace with the changing demographics of the undergraduate student population. This has been a consistent struggle ever since. Women and gender-diverse students were strongly underrepresented in UASU Students' Council and Executive teams between the 1960s and 2017.
 - Concepts and terminology of gender have undergone radical shifts with major implications for how individuals may have identified. Due diligence was applied within the limits of available sources. As a clarifying note, the abbreviation 'WGM,' for 'women and gender minorities,' is used in several charts. Whenever possible, we have disaggregated the distinct statistics and experiences of cisgender women, transgender students, and/or on-binary students, which is only possible with more recent data.
- In 2014-2017, the UASU undertook several initiatives to address and improve gender-based representation in student leadership. Most notably, 2017 saw the creation of the Stride Campaign School, the release of IM1, and an average improvement in gender parity among both Students' Council and Executives. Since 2017, women and gender-diverse students have made up around 55-60% of students, around 45-50% of Students' Council, and around 37% of Executives.
- The past decade overall has seen a significant shift. In the last 10 years (2014/15 through 2023/24), women and gender-diverse students have been 48% of Students' Councilors and 40% of Executives, for a total of 47% of UASU elected leadership. By contrast, in the previous 10 years (2004/05 through 2013/14), women and gender-diverse students were 30% of Students' Councilors and 18% of Executives, for a total of 28% of UASU elected leadership.
- In terms of public self-identification during Executives' terms of office and election campaigns, sexual and gender diversity have largely been invisible. For instance, several LGBTQ2S+ individuals did not publicly self-identify as LGBTQ2S+ during their elections and terms for various personal reasons. This is consistent with the findings of IM1.

Proportions of women and gender minorities



- **Summary of Chapter Recommendations:**

- While recent years have seen significant improvements, women are still consistently somewhat underrepresented, and transgender and/or non-binary students (roughly one out of 20 undergraduates) remain deeply underrepresented. Gender representation in student leadership will need to remain a priority for Executives and across aspects of multiple UASU operations.

Chapter Two: Running for Office and Stride's Direct Impact

- Complete elections candidate records (171 unique candidates) were reviewed. From 2018/19 through 2022/23, women and gender minorities were roughly half of all candidates for UASU Executive, Students' Council, and General Faculties Council roles — and also roughly half of all successful candidates.
- Stride participation started strong, but fell sharply concurrent with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (and the implementation of emergency remote delivery) and has not significantly rebounded.
- Candidate lists were compared against Stride participants from all years. In 2018/19 and 2019/20, roughly one quarter of all women and gender-diverse candidates had been in Stride in any year. This proportion fell steadily until, by 2022/23, around 5% of WGM candidates had been in Stride in any year. Importantly, this analysis did not encompass participants in other UASU leadership development programming, like ELP or ILP.
- Of the 116 unique individuals who participated in Stride through 2022/23, 17% have since run for UASU Executive roles, Students' Council, or GFC, and all who ran for any of these positions have achieved at least one of them.



- Retrospective data (a survey that reached a small segment of past Stride participants) indicated that it generally helped them develop skills, confidence, and motivation. Few went on to desire or pursue elected student leadership of any kind, but most went on to be interested in pursuing (and often achieve) club leadership, community organization positions, and/or jobs with supervisor/manager responsibilities. Virtually all respondents pursued and achieved at least one type of leadership role. This is not to discount the significant impact that campaign schools like Stride can have on individual participants, or the impacts that other UASU leadership programs are having.
- **Summary of Chapter Recommendations:**
 - The UASU should revisit Stride in terms of the scale of resources devoted and the kinds of benefits it is creating.
 - Many points were raised about how leadership programming, within and without Stride, might be conceptualized, constructed, and communicated to students.
 - For five years, women and gender-diverse students have represented roughly half of Executive/Council/GFC candidates and roughly half of successful candidates. The next milestone would be to reach consistent parity (60-65%).
 - Election processes and practices are an area where gender equity can be a greater priority.

Chapter Three: Interest in Pursuing Leadership Roles, by Gender

- This section centres on a new dataset from the 2023 Annual Survey, with comparisons to the 2020 and 2014 Annual Surveys. It focuses on interest in pursuing a wide variety of elected student leadership positions.
 - The previously noted interest gap between men and women largely does not exist at this point, except for Executive and Residence Association roles.
 - Transgender students and non-binary students are much less likely than cisgender men or cisgender women to be interested in pursuing all categories of elected student leadership roles except for 'other student group leadership' (e.g. clubs). This was a major departure from 2020.
 - A wide variety of intersections were explored. A few points of high interest:
 - Over 50% of cisgender women who self-identified as Middle Eastern or North African, Southeast Asian, or Black were somewhat or very interested in pursuing a Students' Council role.



- Among women and gender-diverse students, disability was the factor most strongly and consistently associated with much-reduced interest in Executive or Council roles.
 - As a compounding factor, rates of disability tend to increase by year of study.
 - There is a high degree of overlap between disability and this report's area of focus. In the 2023 Annual Survey data, 37% of all transgender and/or non-binary students self-identified as disabled, compared to ~5% of cisgender men and cisgender women.
 - Focusing on cisgender women, factoring in disability was associated with a ~40% reduction in interest in Council, and a ~30% reduction in interest in Executive roles.
 - Focusing on transgender and/or non-binary students, factoring in disability was associated with a ~50% reduction in interest in Council, and a ~80% reduction in interest in Executive roles.
- The 2023 Annual Survey had extensive data around the barriers preventing respondents from pursuing leadership roles.
 - Women were seven points more likely than men to feel they did not have the right skills/qualifications, but nine points more likely to say they might be interested if they knew more.
 - Generally, men and women had the same main obstacles: fear of too many responsibilities, need to focus on making money, feeling they did not have the right skills/qualifications, and/or not feeling knowledgeable about the positions. Relatively few (~10-15%) felt it would get in the way of their career goals, that it wouldn't be meaningful work, that they had community commitments, that they didn't want that much public scrutiny, and/or that they were afraid of encountering a negative/toxic culture.
 - Non-binary students and, in a separate analysis, transgender students had far-above-average rates of several obstacles, especially the fear of taking on too many responsibilities, the fear that it would not be meaningful work, disability/health obstacles, the fear of a negative culture, the fear of not having the right skills/qualifications, and the fear of too much public scrutiny. Qualitative comments from transgender and/or non-binary students bore these out and contextualized them.
- This chapter also includes summary data from a supplementary seven-hundred-respondent Perks survey in mid-January 2024. It found highly gendered variations in interest in specific positions. Most notably, when asked what their top choice would be among Executive roles, gender-diverse students were

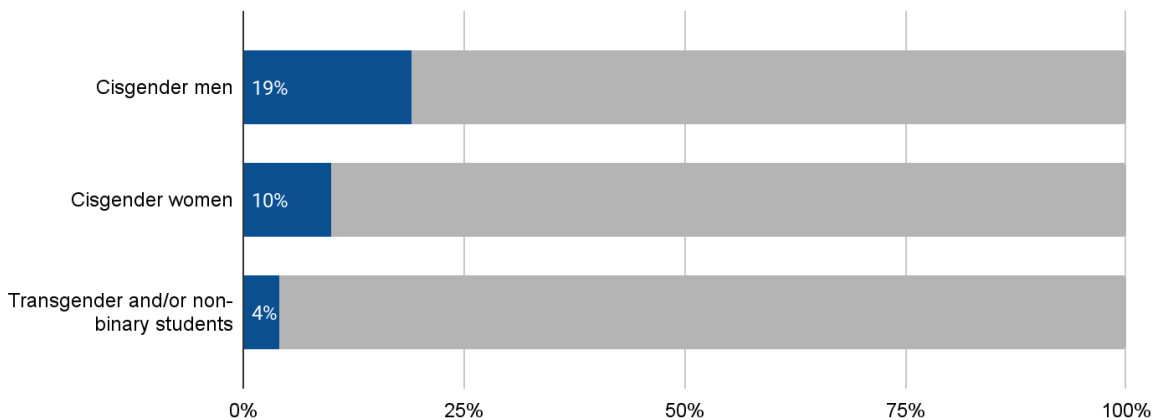
extremely unlikely to pick the Presidency, while cisgender men were almost twice as likely as cisgender women (19% vs. 10%) to pick the Presidency.

- **Summary of Chapter Recommendations:**

- Executive 'shadow days' should be standardized, augmented, and better connected with the campus community.
- Addressing disability and accessibility is a crucial lens for improving gender representation.
- Women and gender-diverse students still disproportionately feel that they do not have the right skills or qualifications; the UASU should explore scalable resources.
- Since the fear of encountering a negative or toxic culture remains a major obstacle for around 30% of transgender and/or non-binary students, the UASU needs to ensure that gender-diverse students who take office find a healthy environment that respects their agency and their seat at the table.
- The role of the President needs special focus in terms of framing.

Percent who picked 'President' when asked which UASU General Election role (Executive or BoG Rep) they would pursue as their top choice

UASU Perks survey, January 11-15, 2024 (n=744)



Chapter Four: Experience After Taking Office

- This chapter used two new datasets that inform assessments of experience after taking office: a list of 70 unique individuals who served as chairs of Students' Council's committees back through 2011/12, and a roster of all formal speaking turns in Students' Council back through Summer 2022.

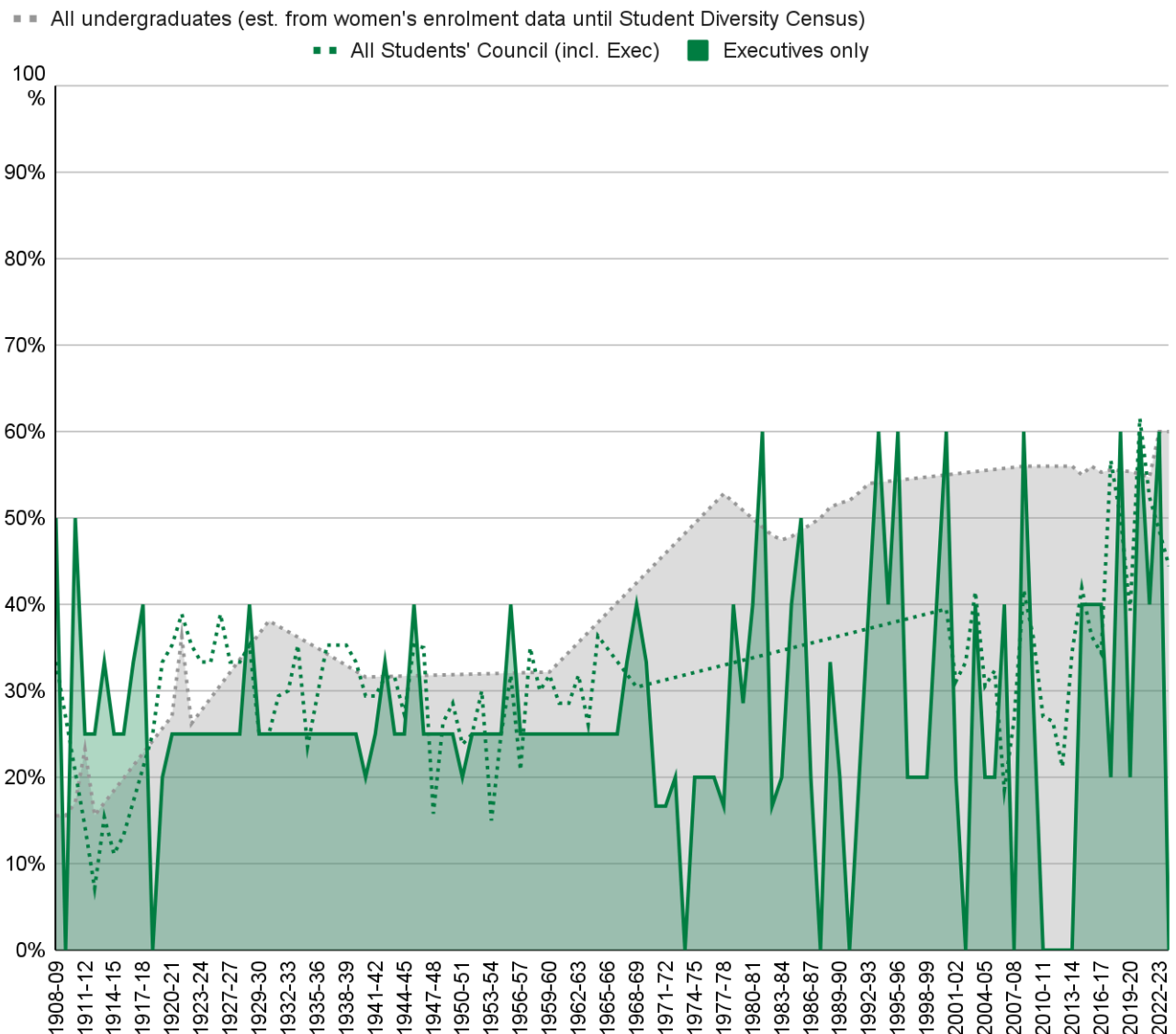


- The formal speaking turns data centred on any time a Council member asked to be put on the speaking list: it included voluntary speaking turns and some operational items, and did not include interruptions, motions, or responses to questions.
- The gender composition of committee chairships has varied but largely kept pace with the improving gender representation in Students' Council. This suggests that, on average, women and gender-diverse Councillors are serving as chairs at expected rates. However, there has been significant variation by committee: some committees had few women and gender-diverse Chairs until recent years, and others are still areas of concern.
- Across five semesters, while the proportion of women and gender minorities on Council, Executives included, has been stable in the 40-45% range, the proportion of formal speaking turns taken by women and gender-diverse students on Council has been stable in the 20-25% range, including in three semesters when women were the majority of the Executive team. This indicates a need to ensure Council's standing orders and norms are fit for purpose.
 - This is despite repeated interventions, including using earlier versions of this data in multiple meetings and training sessions, one-on-one engagement with Council members who were speaking much less and much more than average, and a significant reduction in Council's size. Reported factors varied by year and were linked to unique situations that made women and gender-diverse Councillors less comfortable engaging, as well as barriers to in-person attendance that impaired relationship-building.
- **Summary of Chapter Recommendations:**
 - The UASU should continue to track Council speaking turns, begin tracking committee speaking time when possible, and leverage the data in Council and Executive training.
 - Students' Council's practices and Standing Orders should be reviewed to ensure that, while visitors have a full opportunity to speak in the appropriate portions of the meeting, the Speaker has the appropriate tools to ensure that Council members have a full and fair opportunity to attend, engage, and feel comfortable speaking.
 - Making in-person attendance more practical and comfortable, without stigmatizing remote attendance, would lead to improved opportunities to build a sense of community and camaraderie among the women and gender-diverse students on Council.

Chapter One: Gender in UASU Leadership through History

Please note that this is by no means an exhaustive history of the UASU. Consider reading *Taking Charge: A History of the SU and GSA, 1908-2021*, and *I Was There: A Century of Alumni Stories about the University of Alberta*, by Ellen Schoeck. All information below is from public newspaper archives, UASU records, and University of Alberta records unless otherwise cited. This chart summarizes the quantitative side of our primary source research.

Approx. aggregated proportion of women and gender minorities in the UASU (1908-08 through 2023-24)



The Founding Years (1908-09 through 1913-14)

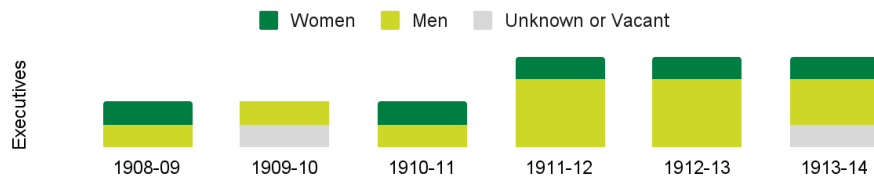
The organization that would become today's UASU adopted a leadership structure that would persist for nearly six decades: a man as President, a woman as Vice President (and generally also an executive of the [Wauneitas](#), a closely-associated women's organization), and men as Secretary and Treasurer.

In the founding years, this structure ensured that women (who comprised 15-23% of undergraduates) had proportional representation in leadership, but were highly constricted by conceptions of gender roles.



1908 Students' Council
Source: UASU Evergreen and Gold (1983)

The first Students' Council had nine student members, of whom three were women: Agnes Kathleen Wilson (Vice President 1908-09), Ada J. Johnston, and Mary Elizabeth Lloyd (eventually VP 1910-11). In several following years, women's representation was much lower (e.g. in 1912-13, out of 14 student members, only the Vice President was a woman).



Women leaders deserve the credit for the first known suggestion of a political advocacy role for students at the University of Alberta. The context was the fight for women's suffrage — the right to vote. In early 1912, less than a year before the establishment of the Edmonton Equal Franchise League, the Wauneitas began hosting lectures and debates on suffrage, women's academic equality, and women's roles in society.

Little is known about most of the women involved in student leadership at that time, but there is one exception. The UASU Vice President, Wauneita Secretary, and Gateway 'Lady Editor' was Jessie Montgomery, a mature student in her mid-thirties. Montgomery would go on to help organize care packages for First World War servicemen; run the phone lines for the University's Spanish Flu epidemic hospital; spend three decades leading the Extension Library, which circulated books throughout rural Alberta; and co-found Edmonton's first community league.



Jessie Montgomery (1911)
Source: The Gateway vol XXI no. 3

While there is no indication that student representative organizations took a formal position on suffrage, the discussions that student leaders hosted were part of a growing conversation at a critical time. Women won the right to vote in Alberta three years later.

First World War and Aftermath (1914-15 through 1924-25)

The outbreak of the First World War had a massive and enduring impact on the student population. Concurrent with the new right to vote, women and women's organizing played a major role in how the University community adapted.

In total, 448 University of Alberta students joined the military to serve in the First World War, and 82 were killed in action — staggering numbers for a campus that only had around 400-450 students in any given year. Women students and recent graduates, including multiple former UASU Vice Presidents, organized care packages and letter-writing for

servicemen overseas, raised funds, and distributed newsletters to inform the campus community of their friends' welfare.¹

Agnes Wilson, who had served as the first Students' Council Vice President at the age of approximately 17, was one of many who struggled with the lack of career prospects available for women after graduation.² In 1918, she crossed the Atlantic to join the war effort as a nurse. Around the same time, her successor Jessie Montgomery was playing significant roles in community organizing and humanitarian relief.



*Agnes Wilson, pictured in 1911,
two years after serving as the first Vice President*
Source: [UAlberta Archives/Folio](#)

The upheavals of this era began to impact gender roles in formal student leadership. When the 1916-17 UASU President accepted a job as a school principal halfway through the academic year, the Vice President, Katherine McCrimmon, ran in an election to replace him, and won.

McCrimmon became the first woman to serve as President, not just at the University of Alberta, but — or so Henry Marshall Tory believed — anywhere in Canada. A few weeks after taking office, at an annual student-hosted dinner for the Premier and the Alberta Legislature, McCrimmon spoke on women's right to vote and advocated for women's representation in University governance. At time of writing, this is the first known instance of the UASU advocating to the government on post-secondary reform.

¹ See also *A History of the University of Alberta, 1908-1969*, by Walter H. Johns and *'How Kola': The Wauneita Society at the University of Alberta, 1908-1930* by Ursula McFadyen.

² See *This Small Army of Women: Canadian Volunteer Nurses and the First World War*, by Linda J. Quiney.



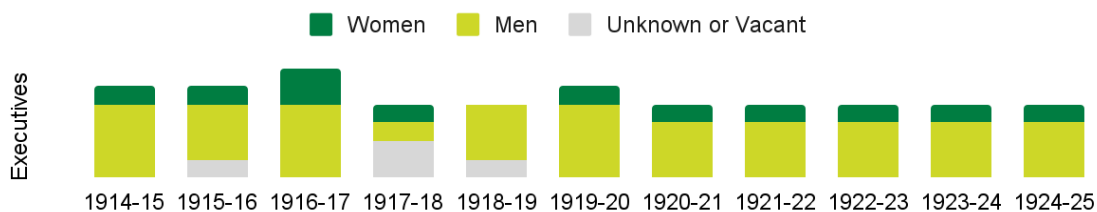
Katherine McCrimmon Love

Source: Public archive at Findagrave.com, provided by family

After the war and the 1918 influenza pandemic, student life and student leadership were transformed. Many students had lost friends or family. Many had acquired, at home or abroad, a depth of hard-won life experience. Some UASU Executives tended to be older, more seasoned, sometimes with lived experience of disability and even ethnic marginalization, and/or experienced at building and leading teams.

Gender parity in Students' Council rebounded: throughout the early 1920s, women consistently made up around 35% of student members, which reflected the makeup of the student population. This was an intentional design: Council positions were earmarked for gendered roles, e.g. the leadership teams of Women's Athletics. This model, and the approximate match between gender proportions on Council and in the student population, would continue for four decades.

However, structural gender imbalances remained consistent in Executive teams. Women largely remained confined to the traditional Vice President/Wauneita Executive role throughout this period. (The two women noted in 1916-17 in the chart below were both Katherine McCrimmon, in her successive roles as Vice President and President.)



The Interwar Years (1926-27 through 1937-38)

Another such instance took place during Fall 1928, when the President resigned. Based on the precedent that Katherine McCrimmon had set twelve years earlier, VP Anna Wilson, a pioneering medical student, became President. She went on to play a leading role in overhauling the entire UASU constitutional and governance structure.

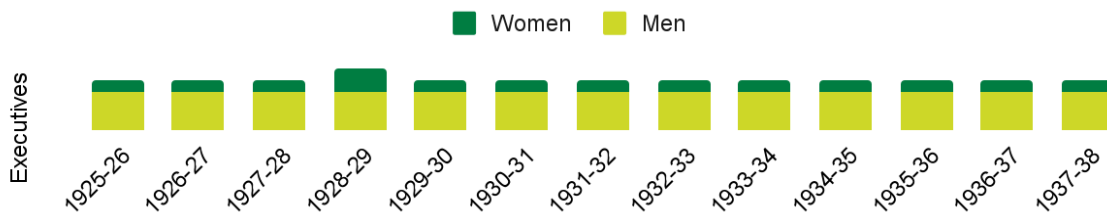


Anna Wilson, B.A.

Source: *UASU Evergreen and Gold* (1928)

During this period, women continued to make up around 35% of all student positions on the UASU Students' Council, which generally reflected the composition of the student population.

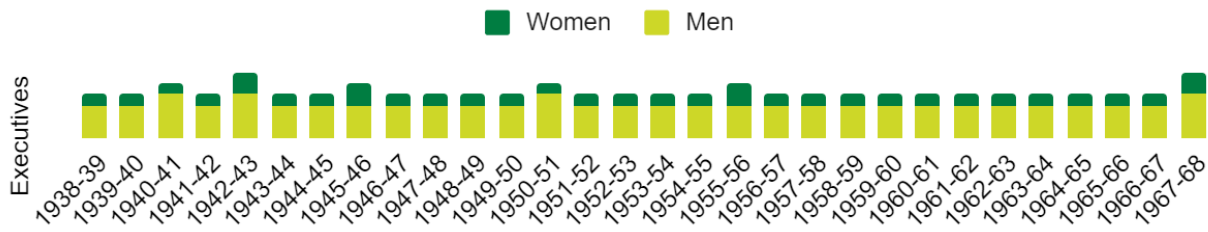
However, at the Executive level, women were still relegated to the Vice Presidency (i.e. 25% of an Executive team), and there had never been an Executive team with more than one woman on it. Nor had a woman ever run for President in a regularly scheduled election. The norms were against it.



The Second World War and the early Rights Revolution (1938-39 through 1967-68)

Based in part on the governance overhaul by Anna Wilson and others, the UASU continued to grow and professionalize. Milestones reached in this era included:

- The growth of civil rights legislation and the beginnings (in the early 1960s) of a culture of student protest.
- Several instances when Vice Presidents resigned and were replaced by other women, rather than by men.
- The first Executive team to include more than one woman simultaneously (1967-68, with women as both VP and Secretary).
- The first Nursing student to hold an Executive role: Pat Routledge (VP 1943-44). Nursing is a program that produced several Executives in the 1940s through 1960s, but to the best of our knowledge, no Nursing student has held an Executive role since 1964. Students from professional faculties can face unique barriers, often with gender as a factor.
- The first known BIPOC Executives, both of them women: Vivian Suey (VP 1947-48), profiled in Identity Matters 2, and Violet King (VP 1951-52). Their presence corresponded with an increasingly diverse student population.



While many UASU Executives have gone on to serve in high government office and find professional success, [Violet King](#)'s achievements are uniquely impactful. She was the first Black woman lawyer in Canada, and the first Black person to achieve a law degree in Alberta. Her namesakes include Edmonton's Violet King Henry Plaza and the University of Alberta's Violet King Henry Law School Award.

As UASU Vice President, King took on substantive administrative roles, including helping to administer the new Students' Union Building.³

³ See [A Century of Campus Maps](#) by Ellen Schoeck.



*Violet King as UASU Vice President
Source: UASU Evergreen and Gold (1953)*

By the end of this period, Canada's [Rights Revolution](#) was well underway, and women began to make up an increasing share (~40%) of the undergraduate student population. Students' Council seats were less gendered, shifting (in the 1940s) away from gender-earmarked roles toward an early version of the modern faculty representative structure.

It was clear that the six-decade-old Executive structure (a man as President, a woman as Vice President, and two other men) was archaic. The Secretary and Treasurer roles had been combined in 1957, and a new Executive role (Coordinator, Student Activities, earmarked for men) had been in place ever since. The UASU's leadership structure was overdue for a change.

1968-69 to 1982-83: Rights Revolution and Leadership Transformation

This period saw additional major milestones:

- Women became the majority of undergraduates.
- The UASU saw its first female President elected in a regular election rather than filling a midyear vacancy (Marilyn Pilkington, 1968-69).
- After six decades, the UASU Executive team abandoned gender-earmarked positions and found a version of its modern form.
- The UASU saw its first female Executive with a dedicated finance role (Eileen Gillese, VP Finance and Administration in 1976-77, later a notable judge and Dean of Law at the University of Western Ontario).
- In 1981-82, the UASU had its first mostly-women Executive team (three out of five concurrent members), the first time since before the First World War that women had comprised at least 50% of Executives.



*Marilyn Pilkington as UASU President
Source: UASU Evergreen and Gold (1969)*

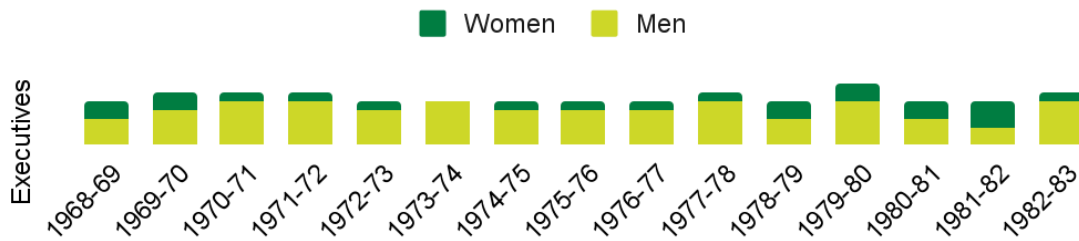
Perhaps the most emblematic and impactful figure of this era was [Marilyn Pilkington](#) (b. 1947). She had served as Vice President in 1966-67, then chaired the committee that drove the transformation of the Executive leadership model. In 1968 she won the Presidency on a platform of UASU structural transformation, representation in all levels of University governance, and better solidarity in provincial and national advocacy.

In March 1968, as President-Elect, Pilkington and her outgoing predecessor led 3000 students to meet with the premier and demand stable tuition and operating grants. The protest went hand in hand with a 6500-signature petition. This appears to have been the UASU's first official mass protest on any issue.



*Pilkington leading the protest at High Level Bridge
Source: The Gateway, vol. LVIII, no. 50*

When the government did not relent, Pilkington's team adjusted their advocacy toward financial assistance improvements and student representation on the Board of Governors. Pilkington was one of the first two students to sit on the Board. She went on to become Dean of Law at York University.



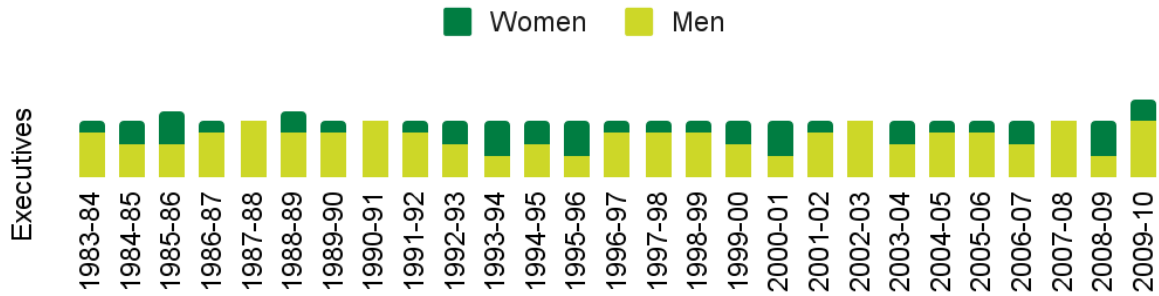
Students' Council membership information is hard to locate for these years, but it appears that the new model struggled to find its feet in the 1970s. Although women were frequently over half of the student population, they were underrepresented in UASU Executive teams. After Pilkington's Executive terms, women remained very much in the minority on Executive teams for the next decade. Only in the late 1970s and early 1980s did women start to consistently fill more than one Executive seat a year. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was implemented in early 1982, the same year that the UASU saw its first mostly-women Executive team.

1983-84 to 2009-10: Modern Governance and Diversity

By this point, student leadership had settled firmly into its recognizable modern structure. Women were consistently over half of undergraduates, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was in place, and the UASU Executive portfolios stabilized. The student population was growing more diverse.

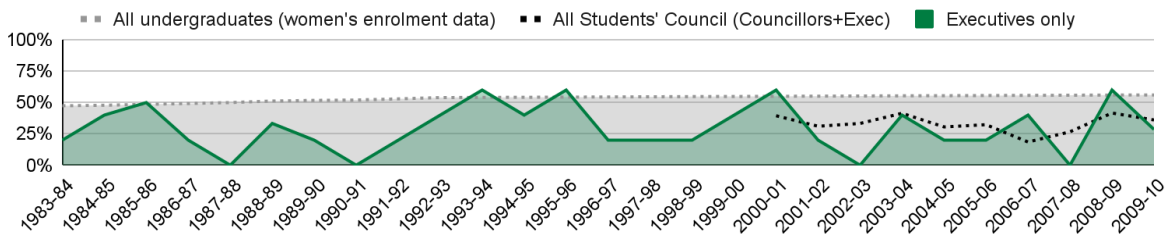
- In 1989-90, the UASU saw its first Executive team composed mostly of students from racial/ethnic minorities (Suresh Mustapha as VP Academic, Peter Chu as VP Finance and Administration, and Aruna D'Souza as VP Internal).
- Around ⅓ of Executives from racial/ethnic minorities during this period were women, consistent with the gender proportions of Executives as a whole.
- Several Executives were LGBTQ2S+, though generally not openly during their terms. (While some previous Executives would certainly have been what we would call LGBTQ2S+ today, the first known LGBTQ2S+ Executives were in this period.)

While there were high points (including several years where women were the majority on Executive teams), women held only 29% of Executive roles during this period, despite making up roughly 55% of undergraduate students. Even after the Pilkington-era reforms, the UASU Executives have never consistently caught up with the student population for gender parity.



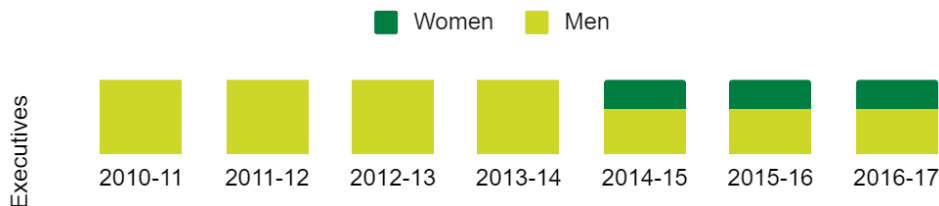
Looking at Students' Council more broadly, reliable records become available in the very early 2000s. The proportion of women had not caught up with the student population, and had barely improved in thirty years.

Approx. aggregated proportion of women and gender minorities in the UASU (1983-84 through 2009-10)



2010-11 to 2016-17: Addressing a Problem

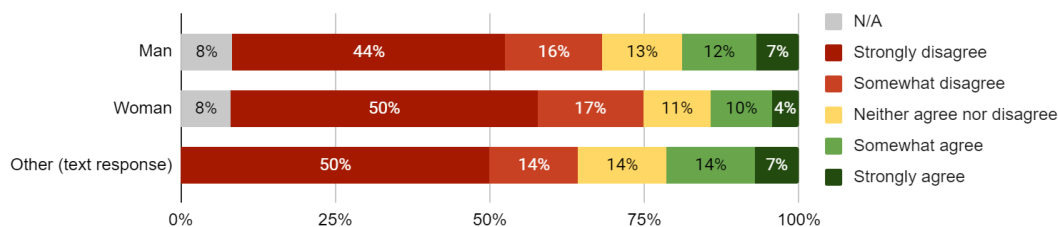
For four straight years, women had no representation on the Executive team. While these teams were highly diverse in other ways (including the first Black UASU President, Petros Kusmu (2013-14)), this was the first time in UASU history that no women had served as Executives for more than one year in a row. During these four years, women were also seriously underrepresented among Council members. Women consistently comprised 55-56% of the undergraduate student population by this point.



Prompted by this situation, UASU staff and Executives took measures to lay a long-term foundation for better gender representation in student governance, including environmental scans, literature reviews, and survey efforts. Some of the measures taken:

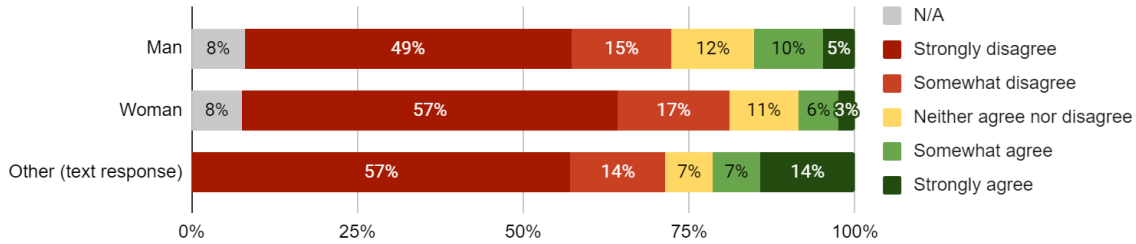
- In 2013, the UASU hired doctoral student Surma Das to coordinate advocacy to University governance and lead a variety of research efforts. Dr. Das would go on to lead the first Identity Matters report, which may have been the most in-depth research project the UASU had ever commissioned, on any topic.
- In an October 2014 survey (n=469), the UASU found that women at UAlberta were far less likely than men to have considered running in a student election. Only 1/3 of students interested in running were women, making men more than twice as likely to be interested. And out of the women who *were* interested, 44% felt inadequate or ill prepared, and 49% felt they did not have the required skills. This survey became part of a 2015 report, '[How Gender Impacts a Student's Experience on Campus.](#)' which also highlighted "the lack of female role models, particularly never having witnessed a female Students' Union President or female SU executive," as a reported factor in students' decisions on running for office.
- The 2014 Annual Survey included a panel of new questions related to election participation and interest. (Note that, at the time, the gender demographic question was man/woman/other (please specify), and very few people opted to use the 'other' text field substantively.) This survey established a significant gap between men and women in terms of interest in running for UASU office, as well as opinions about gender representation in student government.
 - Knew that successful Executive candidates became full-time, salaried employees of the UASU: 51% of men, 42% of women, 43% of other students.
 - Understood that in the UASU elections ballot system they may rank more than one candidate to vote for: 68% of men, 64% of women, 71% of other students.
 - Knew who the successful candidates in their faculty were in the last general election: 35% of men, 35% of women, 57% of other students.
 - Knew where to get general information about running in a UASU/GFC election: 47% of men, 40% of women, 43% of other students.
 - Somewhat or strongly agreed that they would consider running for Council or GFC: 19% of men, 14% of women, 21% of other students.

2014 Annual Survey: "I would consider running for a councilor position on Students' Council and/or General Faculties Council"



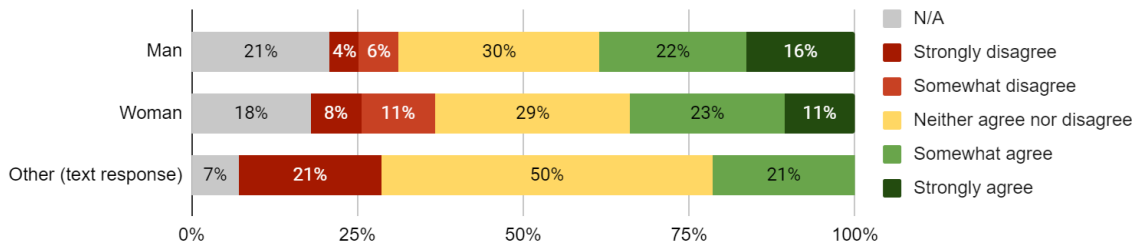
- Somewhat or strongly agreed that they would consider running for an Executive position: 15% of men, 8% of women, 21% of other students.

2014 Annual Survey: "I would consider running for a Students' Union Executive Position"



- Somewhat or strongly agreed that gender diversity was currently fairly represented in student government: 38% of men, 34% of women, 21% of other students.

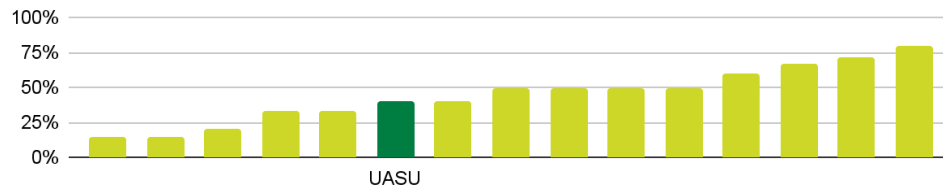
2014 Annual Survey: "Gender diversity is currently fairly represented in student government."



- In a 2015-16 environmental scan of comparator student associations, the UASU found that it was behind the curve in terms of women's participation in both Council and Executive roles.

Women as % of Student Association Executives (circa 2015-16)

Data from STRIDE Research Rationale (2016)

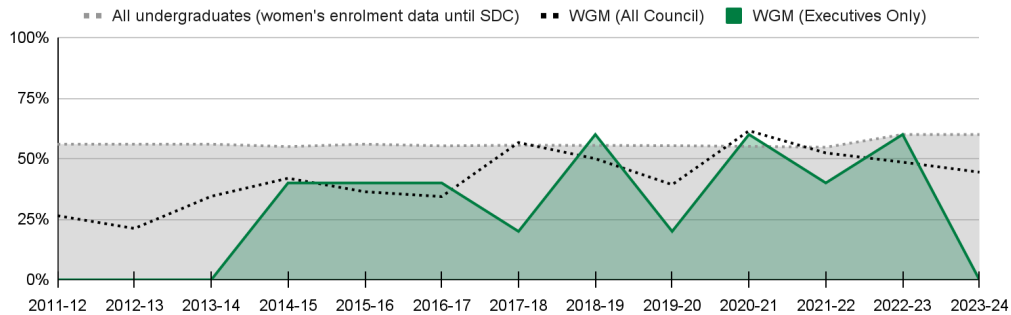


Around 2016-17, a proposal took its final form: Stride, a campaign skills development program for women and gender-diverse students.

2017-18 to Present

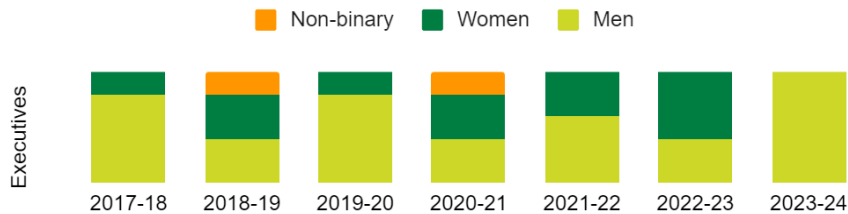
The Stride Campaign School and the first Identity Matters report began under Presidents Fahim Rahman (2016-17) and Marina Banister (2017-18). The subsequent period has seen a major rebounding of gender representation in both Students' Council and the Executive team.

Approx. aggregated proportion of women and gender minorities in the UASU (2011-12 through 2023-24)



Based on the 2021-22 UAlberta Student Diversity Census and the 2022 and 2023 UASU Annual Surveys, 62-63% of students are women and gender minorities. This is significantly higher than the University's enrolment data by sex, which consistently shows around 55-56% female plus a very small number of self-declared 'others.' UASU Executives and Council as a whole (i.e. Executives plus Councillors) have reached approximate gender parity in several recent years, but not consistently. The current year, which has no women Executives, was arguably an anomaly, and prompted the IM3 research project.

Note that, for many equity-seeking demographics throughout the history of UASU leadership, public self-identification while in office is rare. While this period saw several LGBTQ+ Executives, most have not been particularly open or public about these identities while in office, and/or have publicly self-identified as such after graduation. The chart below only shows those who self-identify publicly.



Recall that, in 2017, IM1 noted relatively high proportions of sexual and gender minority representation on Council and Executive teams based on anonymous surveys, but highlighted many challenges around data sources, privacy, visibility/invisibility of facets of identity, and student attitudes. In both the University's Student Diversity Census and the

UASU 2023 Annual Survey, one out of four students self-identified as LGBTQ2S+. Sexual and gender minority identities (including but not limited to transgender students and/or non-binary students) have almost always been largely invisible in student leadership, in ways that have often been associated with personal or electoral risk.

Chapter One Recommendations:

- While recent years have seen significant improvements, women are still consistently somewhat underrepresented, and transgender and/or non-binary students (roughly one out of 20 undergraduates) remain deeply underrepresented. Gender representation in student leadership will need to remain a priority for Executives and across aspects of multiple UASU operations.

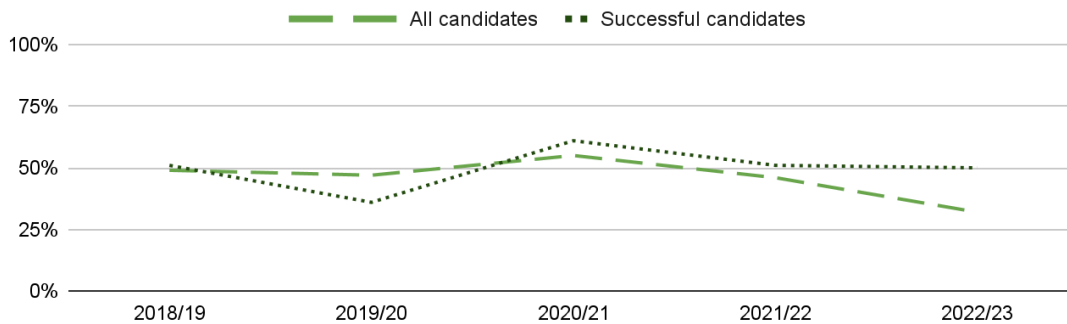
Chapter Two: Running for Office and Stride's Direct Impact

Gender Diversity in Election Candidacies

The slate of research and programmatic initiatives begun circa 2015-2017, all designed to promote or support improved gender representation in student leadership, were likely meant to have a combined encouraging/environmental effect greater than the sum of their parts. The years since then have seen a consistent improvement.

Complete elections candidate records (for UASU Executive, Students' Council, and General Faculties Council roles) were available for 2018/19 and subsequent years. By and large, while women and gender-diverse students made up a minority of candidates, those who did run had strong success rates.

Women and gender minorities as approx. proportions of candidates



While it seems clear that making gender representation an organizational priority likely played a role in the relatively high rates of women and gender minorities both running for and achieving these roles, we can also examine elements of the outcomes of Stride based on available data.

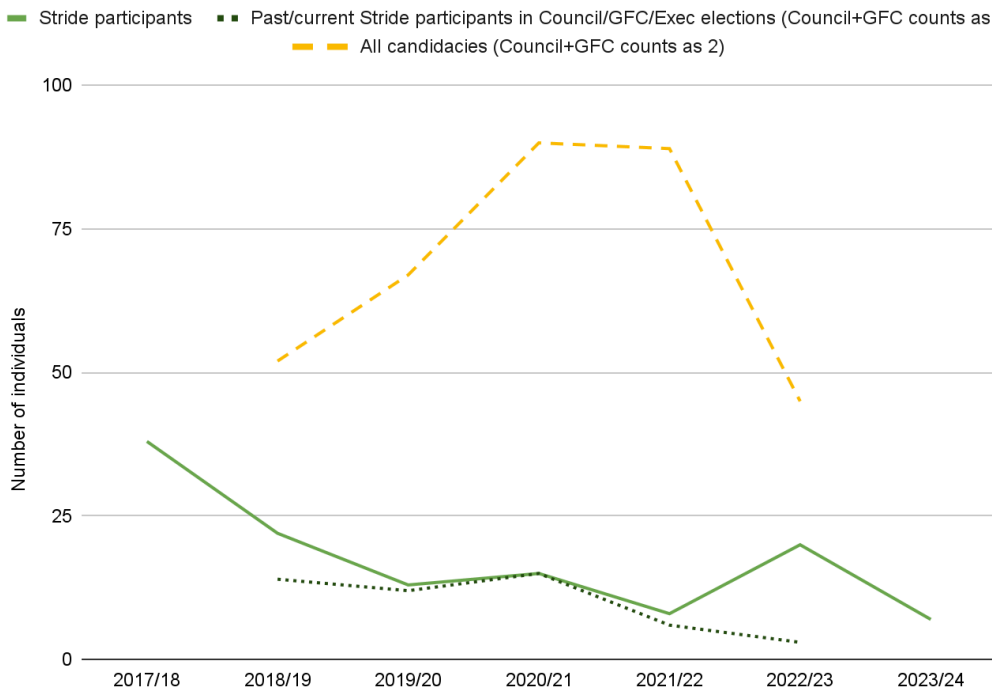
Stride Participants Seeking Office

Looking specifically at Stride, 171 unique candidates for UASU Executive, Students' Council, and General Faculties Council roles (2018/19 through 2022/23 inclusive) were identified and cross-checked against all Stride participants from all years. 45% were women or gender minorities.

116 unique individuals participated in Stride over the course of those years.

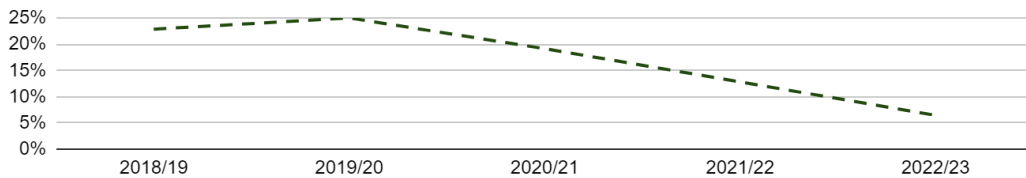
- 6 (5%) ran for an Executive position; 4 did so successfully.
- 15 (13%) ran for Students' Council; 13 did so successfully.
- 17 (15%) ran for GFC, all successfully.
- 20 (17%) ran for at least one of those three roles.

For most of Stride's history, roughly as many past or current Stride participants have run for these three offices in any given year as have participated in Stride during the same year. The exception is 2022/23, a year when, by all available information, Stride participants were particularly interested in working on other people's campaigns rather than in running themselves.



In early years, Stride participants made up roughly one in four or five of women and gender minority candidates for these roles. This ratio fell off even as women and gender-diverse election candidacies stayed relatively stable. In the 2022/23 elections, only two past or current Stride participants (out of 31 WGM candidates) ran for these offices. This means that Stride participants, originally one out of every four or five women and gender-diverse candidates, currently represent 5-10%.

Past/current Stride participants as approx. proportion of WGM candidates

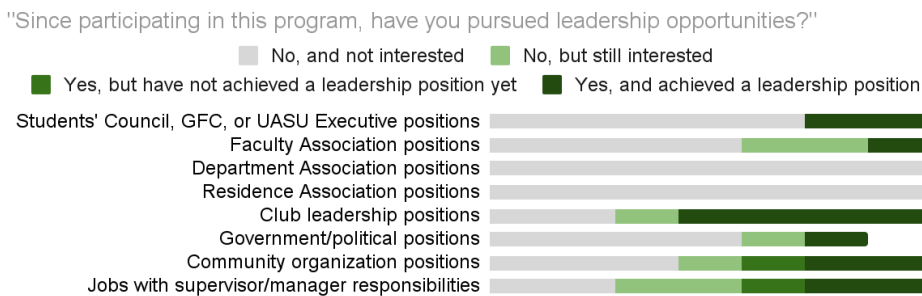
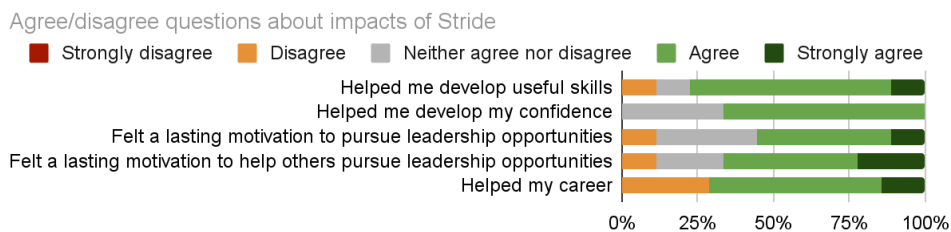


This is not to discount the significant impact that campaign schools like Stride can have on individual participants; the numbers here are only one lens on the program's effectiveness. It is also worth noting that the LEAD Centre's other programming (e.g. ELP, ILP) may be playing a substantial role too, and this would be an area for further study.

Supplement: Stride Retrospective Data

Looking beyond UASU Executive, Council, and GFC roles, students and alumni have opportunities to pursue a much broader array of leadership roles, on and off campus. In Fall 2023, 99 of the 1,101 identifiable past participants in the UASU's LEAD Centre programming (a 9% response rate) agreed to participate in a retrospective survey.

Only seven anonymous respondents had taken part in Stride, but their responses offer an insight into program participants' retrospective thoughts on the value of the program and their experiences seeking leadership afterward.



Two out of seven pursued Council, GFC, or UASU Executive roles, a rate twice as high as the proportion of Stride graduates who actually did run in those elections (see the heading **Stride Participants Seeking Office** above), suggesting that this small survey received responses from especially engaged students. Five out of seven pursued at least one type of leadership role, and four pursued at least two types. Five out of seven achieved at least one type, and three achieved at least two.



Questions to Consider

Questions and opportunities emerged from discussion of these findings. Outstanding items to explore:

- What type and scope of programming would improve gender representation in these roles?
- Is it plausible for some configuration of Stride to have that effect?
- How scalable could these measures be given available resources?
- What strengths and weaknesses are derived from Stride's yearly curriculum being set by its instructor for that year, in the context of their personal experience?
- Does this indicate a possible need to redefine the scope of Stride as a campaign school? Or does it mean that Stride's scope will be broadened to support what is naturally happening — more women and gender-diverse students taking on leadership roles of any kind, not just elected student leadership?
- Is there an aspect of disillusionment with formal governance and politics, particularly among demographics that face added strain from marginalization and code switching?
 - As one consultee put it, "If I have the confidence to be a leader somewhere, I'm going to go somewhere where I'm less likely to deal with oppression."
- In a survey of 99 past participants in LEAD programming (Stride, ASLS, ILP, ELP, and on-demand training), 16% of respondents had run for, and achieved, Exec, Council, and/or GFC roles. Half of them had participated in ILP. Are participants in LEAD's non-Stride programming (ELP in particular) running for office in ways that contribute to improved gender representation? If so, what lessons can be learned?
- Are there opportunities to empower clubs, student associations, and other stakeholders to do their own leadership development efforts across the University community based on localized needs and capacity, e.g. microgrants, trainer-training, or updated tool kits? Could such opportunities produce approaches that respond to and cultivate intersectionality in ways that centralized programming might struggle to do?
- While much effort has been put into internal factors like confidence, skills, knowledge, and perceptions of the roles and their responsibilities, what would it mean to more intentionally address external factors like the roles' requirements, visibility, and interactions with various levels of institutions, as well as the visibility of opportunities?
- Separate from formalized leadership development programming in the 'campaign school' model, should leadership development be construed more broadly in terms of skills and competencies related to (for example) engaging with community stakeholders and volunteers substantively and equitably, or taking leadership in terms of preventing and mitigating bias and inequity, and how do broader concepts of leadership intersect with the success that students are finding in community roles?



- In the [2019 Annual Survey](#), 12.6% of respondents self-identified as neurodiverse. Stakeholder input has flagged that formal campaign school programming may not always be designed with neurodivergent students in mind. How can leadership development programming accommodate these students and prepare them for the challenging experience of running for office or pursuing other leadership roles?

Chapter Two Recommendations

- The UASU should revisit Stride in terms of the scale of resources devoted and the kinds of benefits it is creating.
 - It appears to be effective at helping a relatively small number of students (averaging 13 per year over the past five years) to substantively develop skills and confidence, and both seek and find leadership positions other than elected student leadership.
 - However, it does not appear to be filling a niche that directly contributes to improved gender representation in Students' Council, GFC, and UASU Executive teams: only one out of six participants has run for these positions.
 - The previous section, 'Questions to Consider,' raises several points about how leadership programming might be conceptualized, constructed, and communicated to students. These questions should be assessed in terms of practicality, equity impacts, and potential opportunities, both inside and outside of Stride.
- For five years, women and gender-diverse students have represented roughly half of Executive/Council/GFC candidates and half of successful candidates. The next milestone would be to reach consistent parity (60-65%). The UASU should set compatible and equitable goals to proactively invite women and gender-diverse students to run for office, and work to ensure a positive experience.
 - Election processes require decision-making that speaks directly (and often publicly) to this kind of progress. Based on recent years, examples could include gender-neutral washroom availability for election events, and proactively preventing and standing against transphobic harassment. Preparing the Elections Office for these kinds of decisions will be vital.

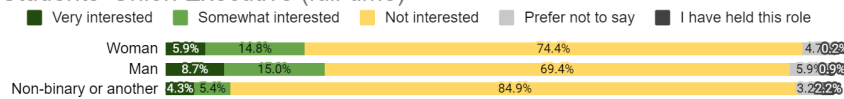
Chapter Three: Interest in Pursuing Leadership Roles, by Gender

As vital context for the falloff of Stride participants' election engagement and Stride's turnout in the last few years, new data from the 2023 Annual Survey shows that interest in pursuing leadership roles has shifted in specific and relevant ways.

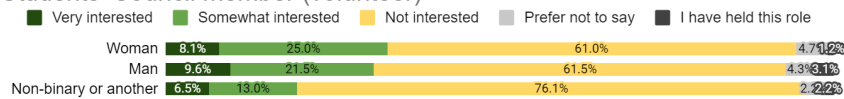
Compared to the 2020 Annual Survey, interest in all seven listed types of formal student leadership roles increased on average. However, there were gender-related disparities.

- In 2023, women were notably less likely than men to be interested in Executive roles or Residence Association leadership; otherwise, their level of interest was comparable.
- Non-binary students and other gender minorities were far less likely than men or women to be interested in any formal student leadership roles except for other student groups (e.g. clubs). This was a major departure from the 2020 data.

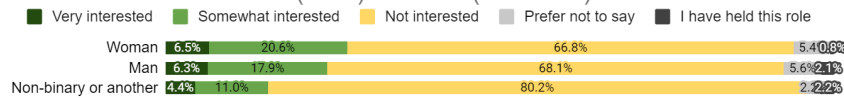
Students' Union Executive (full-time)



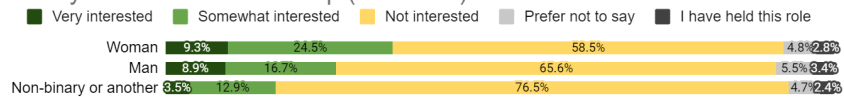
Students' Council member (volunteer)



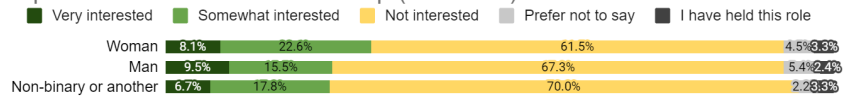
General Faculties Council (GFC) member (volunteer)



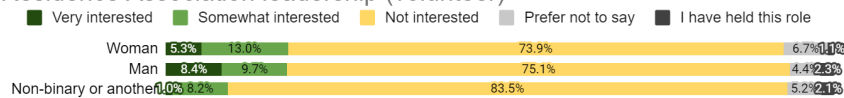
Faculty Association leadership (volunteer)



Department Association leadership (volunteer)



Residence Association leadership (volunteer)

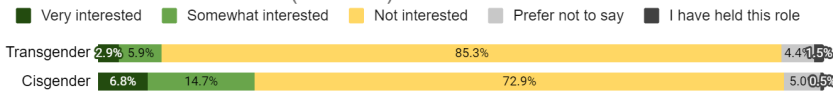


Other student group leadership (volunteer)

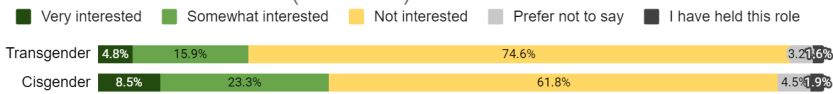


- Two consultees noted that the stark gender gaps around Residence Associations were likely associated with the increased visibility of these roles, including the 'I live here' factor, the risk of stalking, and worries about being supported by Residence Services in these circumstances.
- Transgender students were consistently less likely to be interested in all measured categories of formal student leadership roles. As a caveat, the difference was relatively minimal when looking at other student group leadership (e.g. clubs).

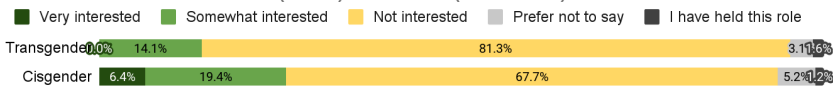
Students' Union Executive (full-time)



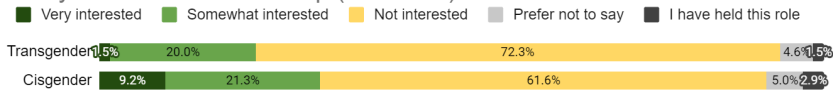
Students' Council member (volunteer)



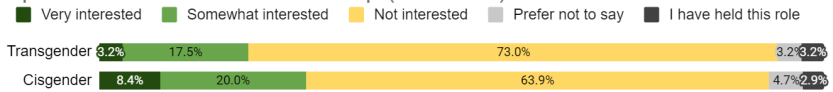
General Faculties Council (GFC) member (volunteer)



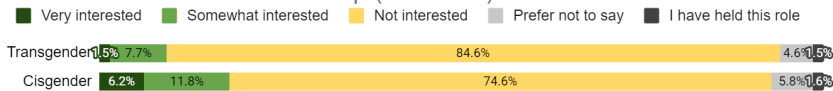
Faculty Association leadership (volunteer)



Department Association leadership (volunteer)



Residence Association leadership (volunteer)



Other student group leadership (volunteer)



The 2020 Annual Survey used a single gender demographic question instead of the two-question format that the Annual Surveys have used ever since. This means that some comparisons meant recombining the 2023 data into the less granular 2020 format: [Cisgender man; Cisgender woman; Transgender man or woman, gender non-binary, or other; Prefer not to say]

Reformatting the 2023 data into these simpler categories, within the technical limitations of working with the matrix question, allowed for a closer look at some big-picture changes since 2020. Across these two large and comparable surveys, cisgender students' interest in these roles generally rose at similar rates (~2-5%), while all transgender and/or non-binary students' rates of interest fell significantly. Broadly speaking, a cisgender man or cisgender woman respondent is currently up to twice as likely as a non-binary and/or transgender student to be interested in formal student leadership, which is a major change from 2020.

	Somewhat+very interested in Executive roles		Somewhat+very interested in Students' Council	
	2020	2023	2020	2023
Cisgender men	20%	24%	26%	31%
Cisgender women	17%	21%	30%	33%
Transgender and/or NB	14%	11%	37%	21%

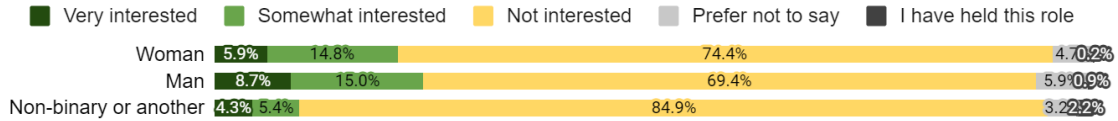
A chi-squared test was conducted on the 2023 Executive and Council interest data that the table above was derived from. It found that the differences between cisgender men and cisgender women shown in this table, in the 2023 data, were not statistically significant. The difference between (cisgender men+cisgender women) and (transgender and/or non-binary) was statistically significant for Executive interest (Chi squared equalled 5.433 with 1 degree of freedom, two-tailed P value of 0.0198). It did not quite rise to the threshold of statistical significance for Council interest (Chi squared equalled 3.166 with 1 degree of freedom, two-tailed P value of 0.0752).

	Somewhat+very interested in Faculty Association leadership		Somewhat+very interested in club leadership	
	2020	2023	2020	2023
Cisgender men	26%	25%	31%	34%
Cisgender women	29%	34%	39%	41%
Transgender and/or NB	30%	18%	43%	39%

There is also a narrow opportunity for reasonably direct comparison between the 2023 and 2014 Annual Surveys in terms of interest in Executive roles. Though these questions did not have the same format, it appears that the interest gap between men and women partially closed in terms of strong interest, and fully closed in terms of less strong interest, over the intervening nine years.

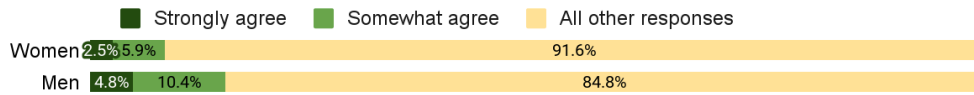
Students' Union Executive (full-time)

2023 Annual Survey



Students' Union Executive (full-time)

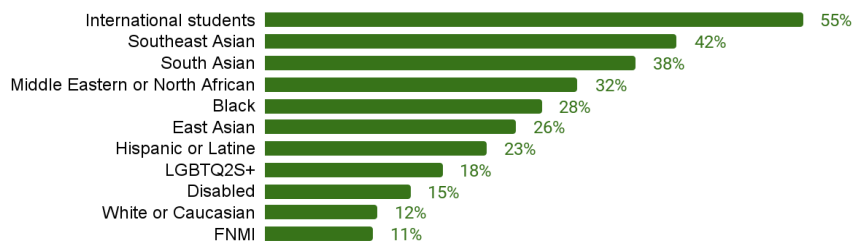
2014 Annual Survey, 5-point Likert scale



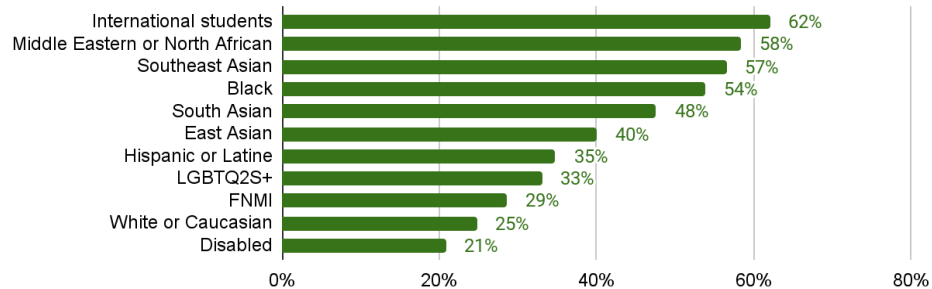
Notes on Intersections

The 2023 Annual Survey data made it clear that women's and gender minorities' average interest levels in these roles vary widely across many dimensions of identity. Note that these categories often overlap, e.g. a disabled East Asian woman would be counted twice.

Percent of cisgender women somewhat or very interested in pursuing a UASU Executive role

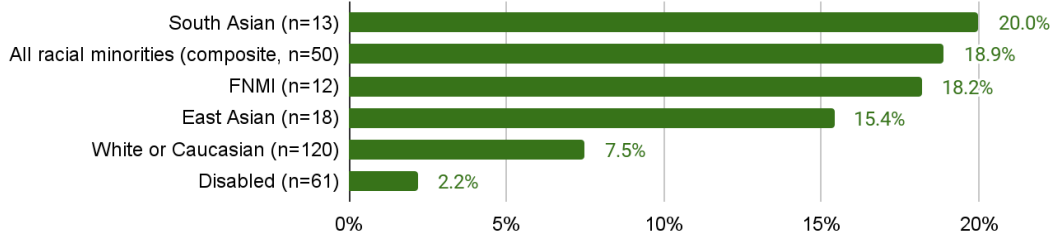


Percent of cisgender women somewhat or very interested in pursuing a UASU Students' Council role

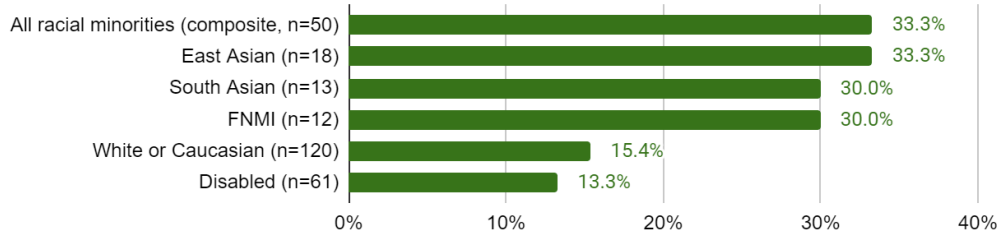


A similar analysis could not be thoroughly conducted for non-binary or transgender students, as cross-tabulating those groups with other marginalized demographics often produced very small numbers of students. However, since non-binary students and students of other marginalized gender identities had very similar levels of interest to transgender students, combining them on an 'and/or' basis produced a subset (n=170) that was large enough to assess over some of the larger intersections in a reasonably meaningful way. Our cutoff for this approach was 10 respondents.

Percent of all gender minorities somewhat or very interested in pursuing a UASU Executive role



Percent of all gender minorities somewhat or very interested in pursuing a UASU Students' Council role



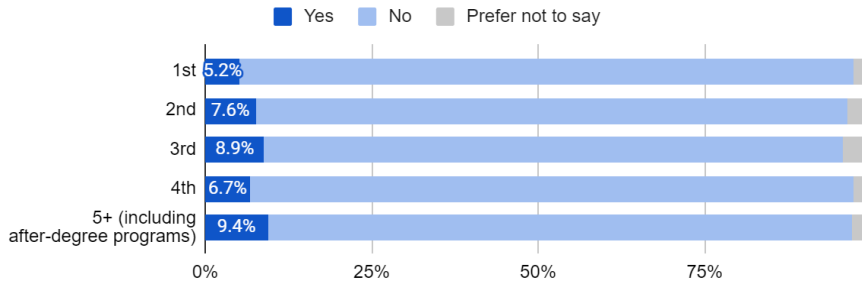
We note that disability remains closely associated with low interest in these roles for cisgender women, transgender students, and/or non-binary students.

- Focusing on cisgender women, factoring in disability was associated with a ~40% reduction in interest in Council, and a ~30% reduction in interest in Executive roles.
- Focusing on transgender and/or non-binary students, factoring in disability was associated with a ~50% reduction in interest in Council, and a ~80% reduction in interest in Executive roles. (For a sense of scale, out of 61 disabled transgender and/or non-binary respondents in the 2023 Annual Survey, only one individual was either somewhat or very interested in an Executive role.)
- By contrast, focusing on cisgender men, disability was associated with a ~40% *increase* in interest in both types of roles.

There is a compounding factor here: self-identified rates of disability tend to increase by year of study.

"Do you identify as disabled?" by year of study

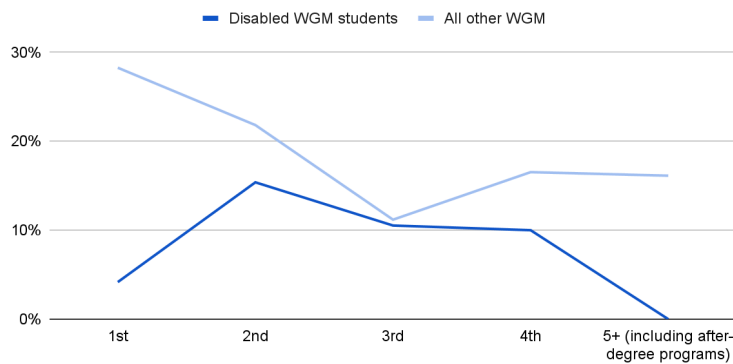
2023 Annual Survey



This means that a significant share of experienced, disabled students are less likely to be interested in those roles.

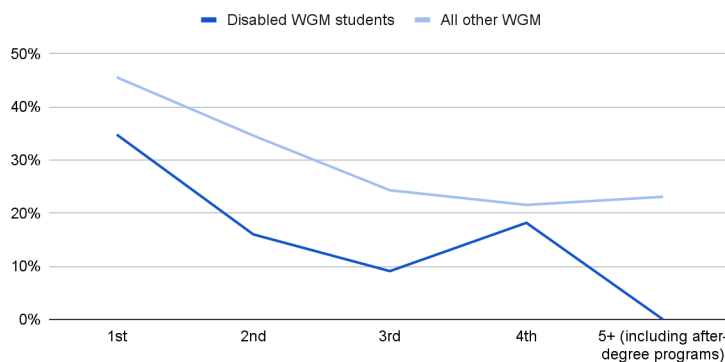
Somewhat or very interested in Executive roles

2023 Annual Survey, women and gender minorities only



Somewhat or very interested in Students' Council

2023 Annual Survey, women and gender minorities only



In short, disability should be recognized as a crucial intersection for addressing gender-based representation in student leadership. And since 37% of all transgender and/or non-binary students self-identify as disabled in the 2023 Annual Survey (compared to 4.7% of cisgender men and 5.0% of cisgender women), placing emphasis on disability could have a disproportionate impact on encouraging and enabling these students.

We also found that factoring in self-identified LGBTQ2S+ identity did not have a consistent impact on likelihood of interest among cisgender students. Instead, that impact varied extremely widely by both gender and race.

- For example, focusing on cisgender women of colour, self-identifying as LGBTQ2S+ was associated with a lower likelihood of interest in Executive roles by 12 percentage points.
- Conversely, queer cisgender white women were five points *more* likely than other cisgender white women to be interested.
- Meanwhile, cisgender men who self-identified as LGBTQ2S+ were just as likely as any other cisgender men to be interested, which held true for both white men and men of colour.

Supplemental Survey — January 2024

A supplemental survey ran in mid-January 2024, leading up to the release of General Election nomination packages. This survey asked about interest in running for the General Elections (Executives plus Board of Governors Representative), in running for Council, and in being a manager or volunteer for someone else's campaign, as well as what specific positions might interest them.

This survey (n=744) ran on the UASU Perks platform and attracted a smaller, more engaged audience. It could be cross-tabulated with concurrent and almost totally overlapping Perks surveys that included demographic questions. Gender-diverse students in this sample, unlike the broader Annual Survey, were *much more* likely to be interested in running.

- "It might seem early, but UASU Elections season is approaching! Have you thought about running for a UASU Executive or Board of Governors Representative position?" (Yes/No)
 - [Yes: man 6%, woman 7%, non-binary or another gender identity 14%]
 - [Yes: cisgender 7%, transgender 17%]
- "Have you thought about running for Students' Council?" (Yes/No)
 - [Yes: man 13%, woman 12%, non-binary or another gender identity 17%]
 - [Yes: cisgender 12%, transgender 22%]

It must be emphasized that this is a smaller and more engaged sample, and the cross-tabulation removed some students who did not take both surveys; as a result, these numbers refer to only 50 non-binary students and 23 transgender students. These findings do not cancel out the Annual Survey findings, but they do offer the additional context that, among a relatively large subset of more-engaged students, there are still dozens of gender-diverse students who have thought about running for these roles, and they have been more likely to consider it than other engaged students. This strongly reinforces the idea of an untapped pool of gender-diverse potential candidates.

The supplemental survey offered another point of interest: it drilled down to the level of individual General Election positions. Blue cells are consistent with the 'other respondents' column; red show relatively low rates; green show relatively high rates.

"If you were to run, which position would be your top choice?"	Non-binary or another gender identity (n=50)	Transgender (n=23)	Other respondents (n=671)
President	1 (2%)	1 (4%)	13%
VP Academic	8 (19%)	4 (17%)	18%
VP Student Life	17 (40%)	7 (30%)	33%
VP External	3 (7%)	2 (9%)	7%
VP Operations and Finance	4 (10%)	1 (4%)	12%
Board of Governors Representative (a part-time role)	9 (21%)	8 (35%)	17%

These proportions and variations should be taken with a grain of salt due to the small numbers involved.

The 'other respondents' category also broke down in noteworthy ways, particularly that cisgender men were almost twice as likely as cisgender women to pick the Presidency as their top choice (19% versus 10%).



Qualitative Input from Transgender and Non-Binary Students

The 2023 Annual Survey also included two text questions about seeking leadership roles, and one multiple-choice question about obstacles. To get a better sense of why transgender and non-binary students tend to be so disinclined to pursue these roles, we cross-tabulated those three questions to assess responses from those students only.

"If a student asked whether they should pursue the role(s) you held, what advice would you give them?" (All substantive responses.)

- Do it.
- Do what will bring you joy and a sense of community but **manage your time carefully** because professors will absolutely destroy your work-life balance, ESPECIALLY the ones who are inexperienced and not entirely burnt out yet.
- Don't be afraid to **ask questions** about your role.
- **Get involved with a group you like.** If you like it a lot, get into an executive position to help the group.
- I'd tell them to be prepared for a large, unpaid, and usually **underappreciated** labor—**good opportunities** for CVs and future grad school, resumes, and jobs. It's fun to connect with people and possible friends and relationships!
- I would definitely encourage **volunteering** with the UASAC [Sexual Assault Centre] and explain how they could go about doing that.
- I would encourage them to weigh their priorities and make an educated decision from the perspective of **what they can maintain** without causing undue stress.
- I'd say it's **very stressful** to do volunteer work, school work, and have a job, but this is what gets you accepted into post grad studies.
- If you like to fill out numerous time-consuming forms to help **generate a social life for others on campus at the expense of your own**, this is the volunteer position for you!
- It's a great **learning experience**. With extra workload you actually learn to manage your time better.
- Learn how to engage with the Students' Union Executives so your voice can be heard and **make connections with the Faculty Associations**.
- **People suck don't trust them.**
- Plan accordingly, as you can risk **over-exerting yourself**.
- Yeah, VP Academic is one of the lighter roles and I find it very **fulfilling** to help my fellow students.



"Are there any experiences or opinions you'd like to share about deciding whether or not to pursue student leadership roles?" (All substantive responses.)

- 1) Everyone sees things differently. 2) Be patient.
- Afraid of public speaking.
- Had a shit experience as a leader in a student group. Felt my work was not valued and **was bullied out**. Others became similar to entitled dictators when given power.
- **Honestly, as a Non-Binary person, I don't expect that I would be elected by the general student body**; I wonder if this is just an internal narrative I should challenge. Nevertheless, **in today's political climate, I also don't need a potential target on my back**.
- I am interested, in some cases on a personal level, in many aspects of the roles and responsibilities of the university's student leadership. At the same time, as someone who will be the **first in their family** to acquire a university education, and as someone who comes from a lower class background, **I have consistently felt like an outsider to the institution as a whole** throughout the course of my undergraduate degree. On top of this, the **opaque, cliquy nature** of a few of the student groups I've come across throughout the course of my degree has kind of deterred me from getting involved in more substantive areas of the student body on top of my full course load.
- I didn't get to do much leadership stuff in high school because of COVID. I'm also currently underage so it feels weird to be in a position of power when my peers are several years older than me.
- I don't think that student leadership does much for students overall and doesn't support student needs. **I'd rather be part of something that actively supports students in need**.
- **I fear that I would face discrimination because I am transgender and neurodivergent**.
- I really couldn't find a lot of **easily accessible information** about what exactly the UASU does or how to join, which is a little bit of a shame.
- I wish there was **more information available** about the roles and how exactly they are involved with the student body.
- I would love to be more involved on campus and pursue leadership roles, but since **my health has gotten worse**, that's simply not feasible for me as I barely have enough energy to go to class and study on a good day. I have unfortunately also had to give up community leadership positions because of this.
- I wouldn't touch an SU position with a 10 foot pole. Any other student group leadership role, I'm keeping the relatively chill ones I've got and **not borrowing trouble**.
- **I'm socially anxious** so I find it hard to work a public-y role.

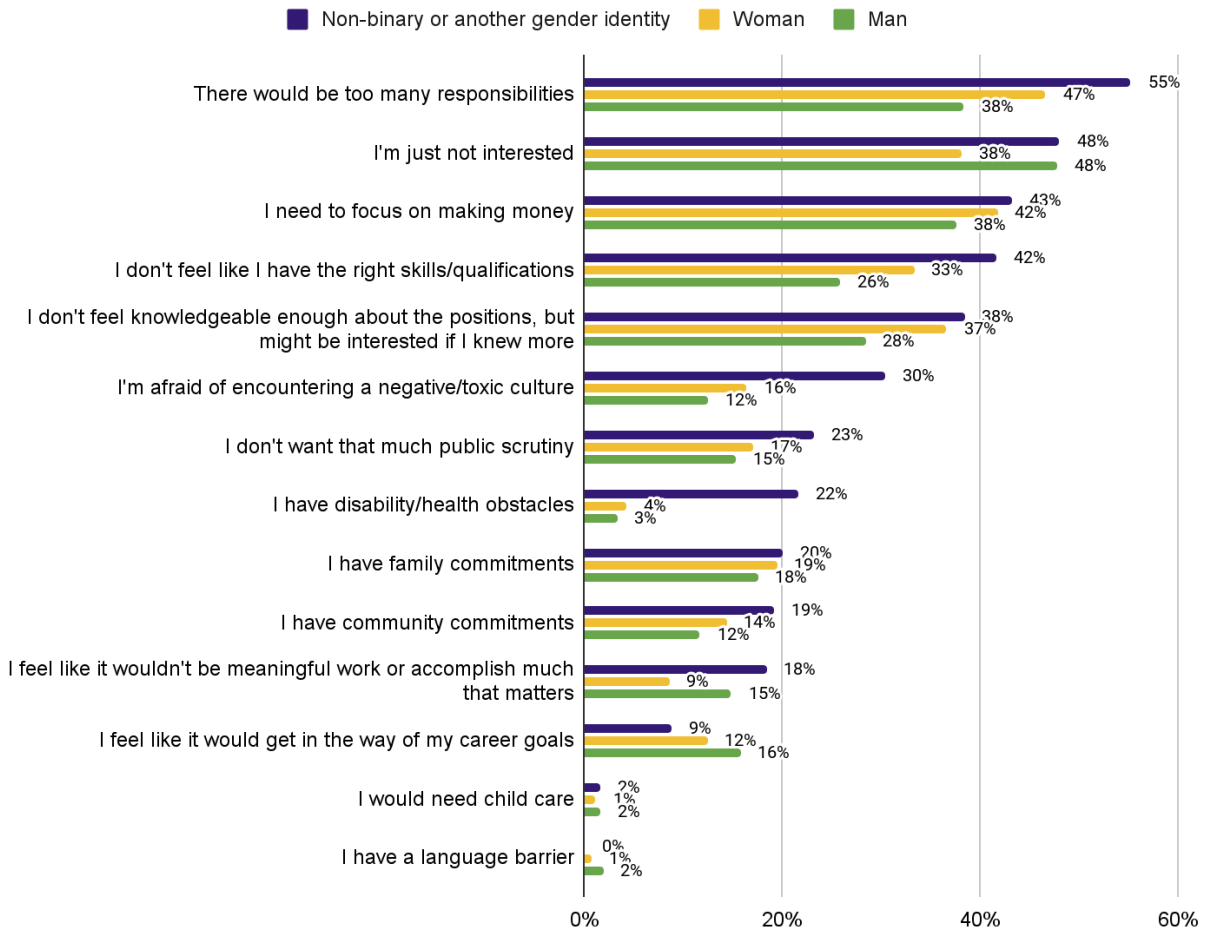


- It doesn't feel like a student leadership role with UASU would be as **beneficial to my career goals** or portfolio or experiences in comparison to something more specific or career-related.
- My degree program needs focus and time to complete.
- School work is too much to volunteer.
- The non-partisan policy requires me to leave my political club to be eligible to hold an elected position. My workplace union understands that elected officials still have the freedom of association but must be held responsible to represent their constituents, but the Students' Union doesn't, and it makes it feel much less democratic by promoting **students with political interests to become uninvolved with the union.**
- They should count for course credit or you should be eligible for bursaries for participating in them to offset the **opportunity cost of giving up work time.**
- When I was a general member of the Agriculture Club I was not given a very warm welcome, I assumed it was because I am visibly a lesbian and wondered why other minorities left. I would have pursued student leadership in the club, had I not been told by POC the amount of racist comments that occur at the "unofficial" official drinking events. **I do not feel comfortable** in the Agriculture Club despite being an Agriculture student. Maybe I should just change my degree.
- When you need to be able to buy things like food and pay for things either now or in the future **you can't volunteer as it takes away the ability to afford basic human needs.** If there were more paid positions I would be more interested but I can't volunteer right now due to having to save for next year.
- Word of mouth. I often have to speak with people directly and therefore volunteers and leaders come from a closed community where **everyone knows each other** before getting involved.

2023 Annual Survey: "What would be your main obstacles to pursuing student leadership roles? Choose all that apply."

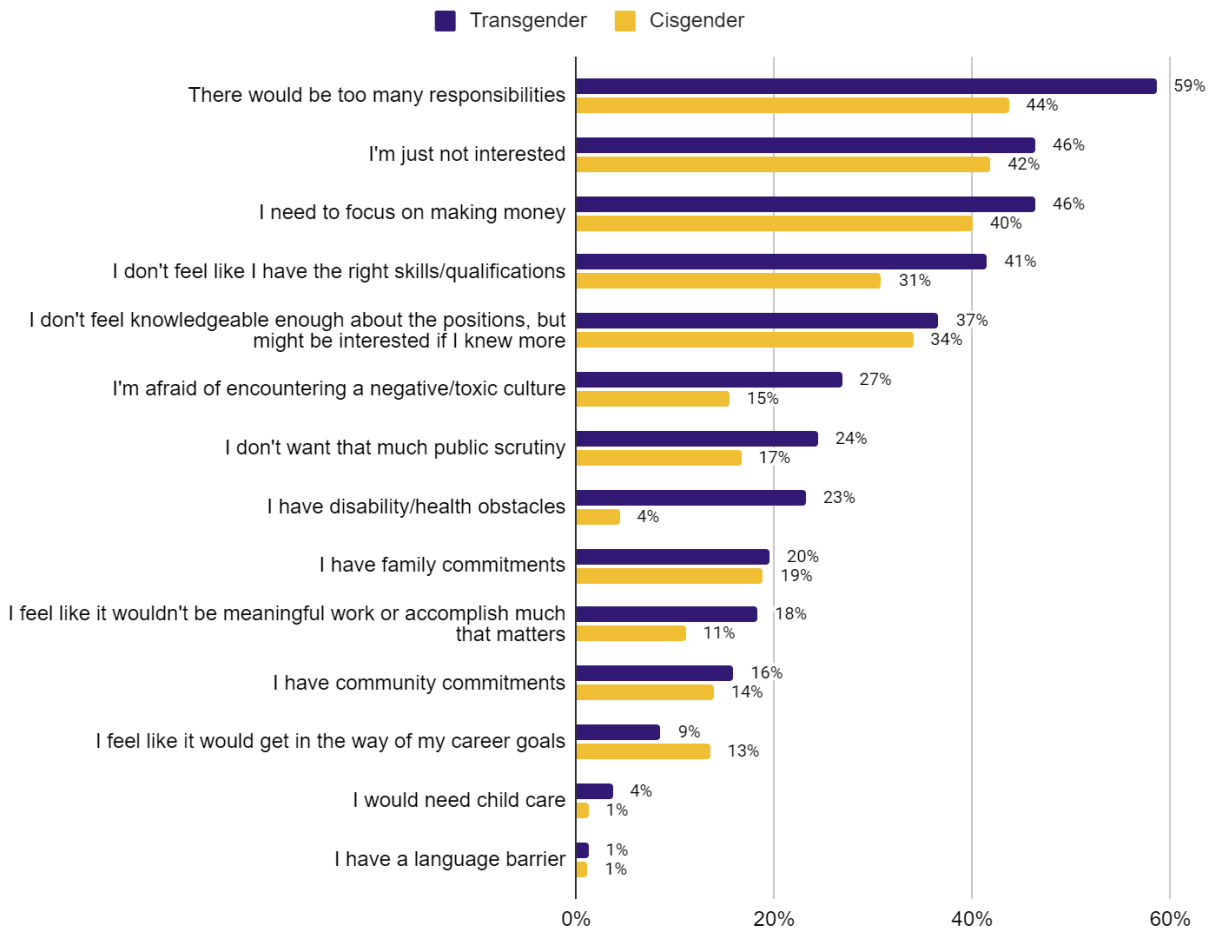
Looking at non-binary students and students of other gender identities, they showed above-average likelihood of feeling there would be too many responsibilities, that they do not have the right skills or qualifications, that they are afraid of encountering a negative or toxic culture, that they do not want that much public scrutiny, that they have community commitments, that the work would not be meaningful, and especially that they have disability/health obstacles. In fact, they were 5-6x more likely than men or women to feel that disability/health issues would be among their main obstacles to pursuing student leadership roles.

Note that the 'language barrier' option likely underrepresents the students who do face a relevant language barrier, who would be less likely to complete the survey.



In the same chart above, we also see some interesting average differences between men and women. Women were seven points more likely than men to feel they did not have the right skills/qualifications, but nine points more likely to say they might be interested if they knew more.

Looking at the same data for transgender students, we see that transgender students are more likely than cisgender students to: feel there would be too many responsibilities (+15 percentage points), need to focus on making money (+6), feel like they did not have the right skills/qualifications (+10), fear encountering a negative/toxic culture (+12), not want that much public scrutiny (+7), have disability/health obstacles (+19), and feel it would not be meaningful work (+7).



Looking at the 'I'm just not interested' response, we note that transgender respondents, like non-binary respondents, are roughly as likely as any other student to be totally disinterested. The inconsistency between this and the interest levels charted at the start of Chapter Three strongly suggests that many of these obstacles are 'tipping the scale.' It is also worth noting that the >40% of transgender and/or non-binary respondents who do not feel they have the right skills or qualifications likely correspond to a few hundred undergraduate students, an order of magnitude larger than workshop programming has managed to train thus far.

As a further level of analysis, we looked at the obstacles specific to the small number of transgender (7) and/or non-binary (9) students who were somewhat or very interested in running for Executive positions. Most listed obstacles were only selected by one or two students, except for 'there would be too many responsibilities,' 'I need to focus on making money,' and 'I don't feel knowledgeable enough about the positions, but might be interested if I knew more.'



Chapter Three Recommendations

- Executive 'shadow days,' typically coordinated by each year's Executive team, allow students to shadow individual student leaders through meetings and discussions. This practice should be revisited with an eye to augmenting and standardizing it, as well as more systematically soliciting participation from student groups at all levels. Aggregate participant data (gender, in particular) should be tracked longitudinally.
- Addressing disability and accessibility is a crucial lens for improving gender representation. In the 2023 Annual Survey, transgender and/or non-binary students in students were over 5x more likely than average to cite disability/health as a primary obstacle to seeking office, and disability was strongly associated with reduced interest in elected leadership across women and gender-diverse students.
 - In the [2020 Annual Survey](#), around one out of five respondents had at least one type of accessibility need. In the [Student Diversity Census](#), about 10% identified with some form of disability.
 - Disability and accessibility in student leadership is worth a scope of research and programming comparable to what has been done for gender, and would likely have disproportionate benefits for gender representation.
- Feeling they do not have the right skills or qualifications remains a major barrier for women and gender minorities across the board (26% of men compared to 33% of women and 42% of non-binary students; 31% of cisgender students compared to 41% of transgender students). Since this impacts many hundreds of students, the UASU should explore scalable resources to help candidates develop their skills and feel their skills/qualifications are sufficient to run for office.
 - Current election materials promote a message consistent with the idea that 'you are enough.' This is an approach that should guide future efforts.
 - Scalable resources could include parallels to the excellent work done by Conestoga Students Inc. (the student association of Conestoga College, a very large college in Ontario), which provides short asynchronous '[pre-election training modules](#)' to everyone who wishes to run. This practice has sharply increased candidates' level of base knowledge about the positions in question, which in turn impacts perception of skills and readiness.
- Fear of encountering a negative/toxic culture is another major barrier (12% of men compared to 16% of women and 30% of non-binary students; 15% of cisgender students compared to 27% of transgender students). Much of this is informed by word of mouth from those who have positive or negative experiences in these roles. As Chapter Four explores, it is vital to ensure that the women and gender-diverse students who take office find a healthy environment that respects their agency and their seat at the table.
- The major gender gap around the Presidency as a first choice of role suggests a need to reframe and address the role of President in (among others) advertising and leadership programming.

Chapter Four: Experience After Taking Office

What kinds of experiences do women and gender-diverse students find once in office? IM1 examined this qualitatively, and found that helping people to run is not enough; the UASU also has a responsibility to work toward a healthier and more supportive environment for those who achieve these roles.

Meanwhile, the experience that women and gender-diverse students find in these roles can strongly inform others' willingness to pursue them. The 2020 Annual Survey found that having a friend who had been a Councillor was associated with a 13-point increase in pursuing that role, rising to 18 points for Executive roles. That is a strong and influential channel of communication between current/past Council members and future candidates.

After developing datasets from governance records, IM3 has two new quantitative options for exploring the question of the experience that women and gender-diverse students find in these environments.

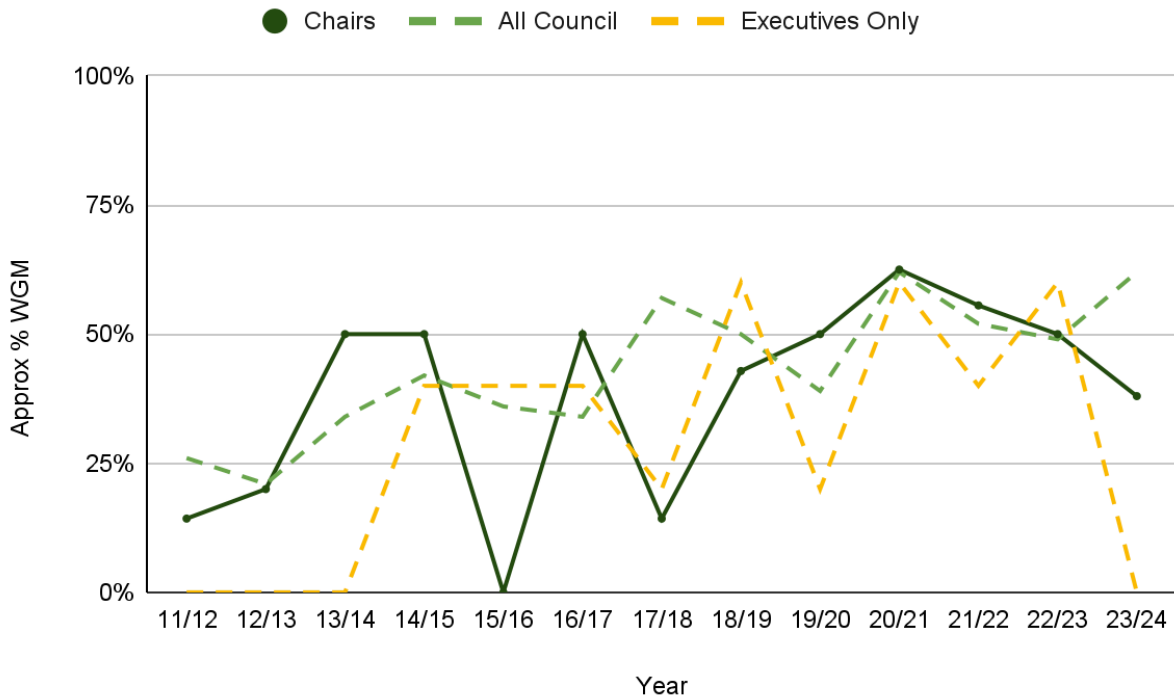
- How likely are women and gender-diverse students to become chairs of committees?
- What proportions of formal speaking turns do they take in Students' Council?

Committee Chairships

Depending on the committee and the year in question, chairs are usually Councillors, but many have also been Executives and/or students at large. Chairs direct a significant portion of the UASU's governance work and some have important operational responsibilities.

The UASU Governance Department reviewed committee records back to 2011/12 and provided a list of 70 individuals (40 men, 30 women and gender-diverse students) who served as chairs. This list came with the caveat that committee chairs have been known to change during the year; these cases have been captured, when possible. The level of certainty around all chairs' gender identities back to 2011/12 is also not perfect. The list includes 11 committees and omits various subcommittees and ad hoc working groups.

With those limitations in mind, it appears that the gender composition of committee chairships has varied, but is trending up alongside Council. In other words, it appears that WGM Councillors achieve chairships at proportionate rates. (The downtick in 2023/24 is attributable to the few committees that have Executives as chairs, noting that 2023/24 is the year when all Executives were men.)



These results varied significantly by committee: Nominating Committee (folded into CAC this year), Policy Committee, and ARRC have historically had higher rates (50%+), while Audit, Bylaw, the Council Administration Committee (CAC), and Finance were all in the 30% range over the time frame in question. Looking at just the last five years, however, cisgender men have made up a minority of Audit and Bylaw chairs. This suggests that particular attention could be paid to encouraging women and gender-diverse candidates for chairship of CAC (which has also taken on Nominating Committee's functions) and Finance.

Council Speaking Turns

In Fall 2022, several women on Council noted that they did not feel they had a full and fair opportunity to speak in Council meetings. Governance management made speaking turn tracking an area of special focus, and Executives engaged with Councillors who were speaking much less and much more than the average.

While tracking, Governance staff defined "a speaking turn, for the purpose of this dataset...as any time that a member of Council explicitly asks for their name to be put on the speaking list. This does not include any interruptions, unofficial speaking turns, motions or responses to other members' questions."

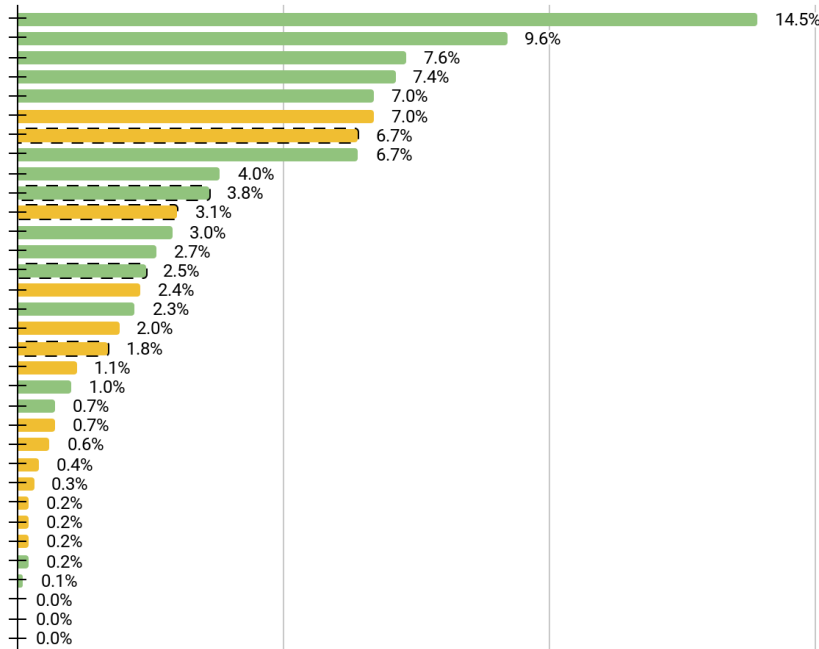
The resulting data was brought to Council in several venues at the Executives' direction, and has been tracked each semester since. Across five semesters, the proportion of women and gender minorities on Council, Executives included, has been stable in the 40-45% ranges, but the proportion of formal speaking turns taken by women and minorities on Council has been stable in the 20-25% range, including in three semesters when women were the majority of the Executive team. Reported factors have varied, as discussed below.

These findings have informed GovCamp, Council's annual training retreat, and other Council training practices. They have also prompted further and ongoing research, including assessment of speaking time in selected committees using new analytical software.

In the charts below, the vertical axis marks individual voting members of Council.

Students' Council Speaking Turns: Summer and Fall 2022

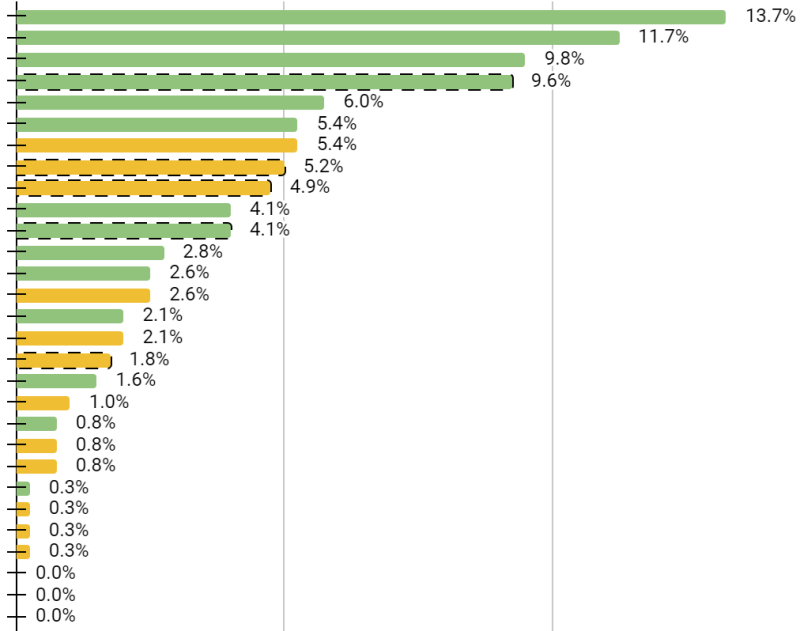
Green = men, gold = women and gender minorities, dashed outline = Executive



Percent of Speaking Turns

Students' Council Speaking Turns: Winter 2023

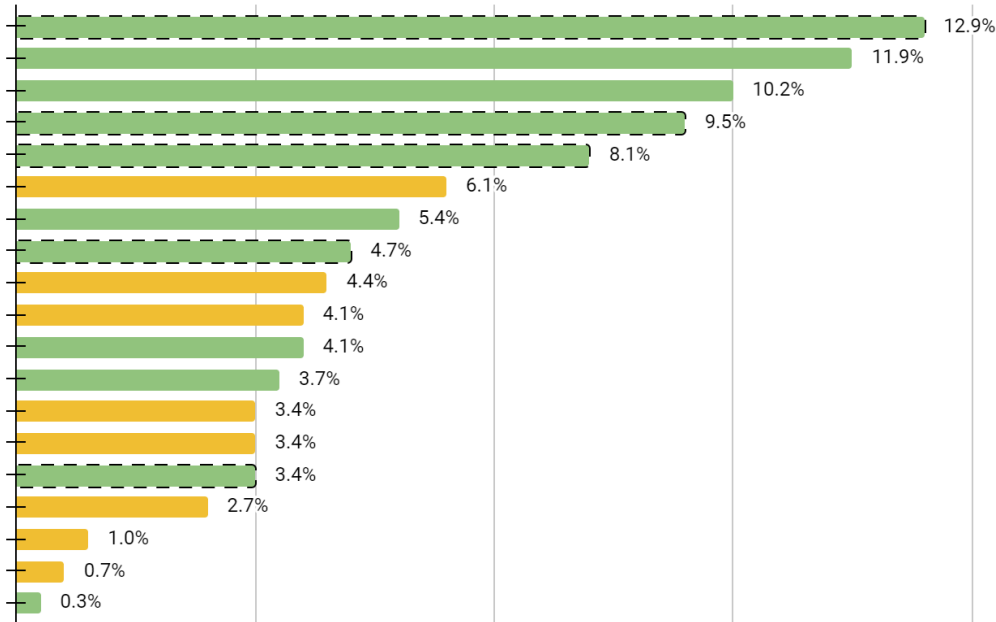
Green = men, gold = women and gender minorities, dashed outline = Executive



Percent of Speaking Turns

Students' Council Speaking Turns: Summer 2023

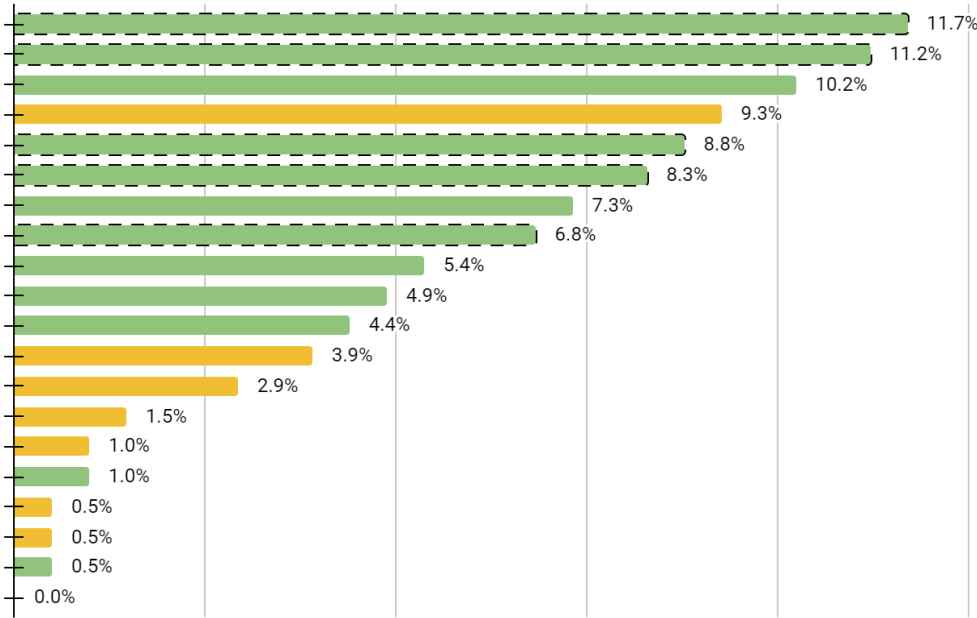
Green = men, gold = women and gender minorities, dashed outline = Executive



Percent of Speaking Turns

Students' Council Speaking Turns: Fall 2023

Green = men, gold = women and gender minorities, dashed outline = Executive



Percent of Speaking Turns

Reported factors have varied. The notes below were informed by discussions with Council members and with the Governance support staff present at various Council meetings.

- In 2022-23, particularly Fall 2022, it was noted that a very small number of Councillors persisted in taking a disproportionate share of speaking turns.
- In Fall 2023, Council meetings saw an unusually high number of statements and questions from visitors at several recurring meetings, which often became contentious. Council members identified that these and several related situations made meetings unique in terms of reduced opportunities to engage meaningfully.
- In Fall 2023, women and gender-diverse students in Council tended not to attend meetings in person, which was both impacted by various barriers to participation and created additional barriers. One major outcome that Council members identified was that a lack of in-person involvement led to a reduced sense of community, belonging, appreciation, and mutual support between women and gender-diverse students on Council.
 - The Speaker of Students' Council was noted as having done a good job of proactively soliciting comments from online attendees, and this behavior was noted as important to continue in future years.



Chapter Four Recommendations

- The UASU should continue to track Council speaking turns and leverage the data in Council and Executive training.
 - The idea of publicly tracking this data with names attached was judged to be counterproductive, as it might make Councillors at the lower end of participation feel further discouraged.
- The UASU now has the technical capability to track speaking time in other ways, in both Council and committees. This data should be collected, explored, and used to ensure equitable opportunities for those who wish to participate.
- Students' Council's practices and Standing Orders should be reviewed to ensure that, while visitors have a full opportunity to speak in the appropriate portions of the meeting, the Speaker has the appropriate tools to ensure that Council members have a full and fair opportunity to attend, engage, and feel comfortable speaking.
- When possible given individual circumstances, in-person attendance at Students' Council should be encouraged, and the Speaker should continue to proactively encourage engagement from online attendees, in order to address the accessibility barriers associated with online participation. Making in-person attendance more practical and comfortable, without stigmatizing remote attendance, would lead to improved opportunities to build a sense of community and camaraderie among the women and gender minorities of Council, particularly as it is chronically a men-dominated space.