

COVER STORY

Student activism on campus

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THE need for campus elections at varsities is important for young people to get their voices heard. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) Student Representative Council president Adib Ashman Burhan Burhanuddin said, the campus election sees candidates from two coalitions contesting to gain majority and control of the council.

One party is pro-university, while the other provides different viewpoints.

Usually, each faculty is represented by two candidates. There are a few general zones, depending on the university, and each zone comprises four or five faculties.

Each zone is represented by two candidates. A faculty representative is akin to a state assemblyperson and each general representative is similar to a Member of Parliament.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) architecture student Muhammad Firdhaus Razali, 24, said the campus election trains undergraduates to be leaders.

"The campus election process is similar to the general election — candidates have to be nominated and there is campaigning and voting.

"Student leaders fight for students' welfare and campus development, rather than political issues.

"It is a stepping stone for those who want to embark on a political journey in the real world after graduation," added Muhammad Firdhaus.

Rafidah Ruzmi, 23, a publishing undergraduate from the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), said the campus election exposes students to the general election in the country.

"It may not be exactly the same but we get an idea of the overall election process," said Rafidah.

She added that the campus election chooses a group of people to be the channel between students and the university management in voicing the former's opinions.

Another undergraduate, Patrick Lim, 24, from one of the local public universities, believes it is important to have "an independent student body in place."

ELECTION PROCESS

Campus elections come under the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (Act 30).

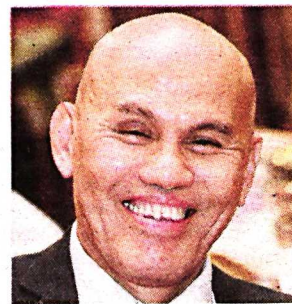
This Act, apart from emphasising the establishment, maintenance and administration of the university, provides for the setting up of the Student Representative Council.



Adib Ashman Burhan Burhanuddin



Muhammad Firdhaus Razali



Candidates must uphold the dignity of the university as stipulated in the UiTM Act should they want to contest in the campus election.

ABDULLAH MOHD SAID
UiTM deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs)



Pro-Aspirasi of UKM celebrating its victory at the recent Student Representative Council campus election (MPP 2017/2018).



UM students taking a shuttle van to a polling centre during a campus election.

Annually, the University Student Election (campus election) is organised in every public university concurrently, or around the same time.

Elected students form a body, namely the Student Representative Council, and channel their opinions to the university, similar to the Members of Parliament elected by the people to lead, care for and defend the rights of the people.

An election is a mechanism by which people choose their representatives at regular intervals and change them if they wish to do so.

The electronic voting system (e-voting) has been implemented in campus elections at local universities since 2004, replacing the

manual system. The e-voting system uses the student's registry to determine the eligibility to vote.

After verification by the e-voting system using the student's MyKad numbers, students will be then allowed to vote, which saves times and reduces the error margin and spoil votes during the voting process.

UiTM deputy vice-chancellor (student affairs) Professor Datuk Dr Abdullah Mohd Said said student elections are part of the learning process.

He added that leadership skills enhance marketability and help students learn time management.

"However, candidates must uphold the dignity of the university as stipulated in the

UiTM Act should they want to contest in the campus election.

The act includes rules and regulations concerning the election processes such as nomination, campaigning and polling.

"At UiTM, the campus election is usually held in September and January. Candidates who have won will hold their position for one academic year."

Newly appointed University of Malaya (UM) Student Representative Council (Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar, MPP) president Syaiful Asyraf Kamarudin, 23, said: "There are seven days between nominations and polling day.

"There is a 24-hour objection period before the candidates start campaigning at the faculty during the day and at the residential college at night for three days," said Syaiful Asyraf, who is pursuing the Bachelor in Spanish Language programme at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics.

There is no campaigning on polling day and candidates can only encourage fellow students to vote.

"The Student Affairs Division will announce the results at around 8pm and call for a meeting to nominate the top four candidates for the MPPUM.

Syaiful Asyraf's party, Penggerak, won the majority of seats to lead the Student Representative Council 2017/2018 and voted him president.

Third-year law student Adib Ashman was elected MPPUKM president for the first term of 2017/2018.

"Campaigning as a team under Aspirasi, we delivered our manifestos individually without mentioning the team we're supporting

due to Election Commission rules and regulations.

"It is compulsory for every UKM student to vote and on polling day, students are given a class exemption," said Adib Ashman.

Student leader president Muhammad Syahid Aiman Muhammad Bazlan, 22, from UiTM said: "All the candidates campaigned on social media and at their respective faculty.

"The integrity and leadership of the candidates during the election process should be praised because they were committed to the university instead of personal gain," said Muhammad Syahid Aiman.



Syaiful Asyraf Kamarudin

MANIFESTOS

Contesting under Mahasiswa Putra, formerly known as Pro-Aspirasi (which is in line with the university's aspiration), Muhammad Firdhaus' manifestos included a covered walkway and a food kiosk at the Faculty of Design and Architecture.

The proposed covered walkway did not materialise due to lack of funds but Muhammad Firdhaus said he will find a way to make it a reality one day.

However, the food kiosk was approved and, with the help from the UPM Student Affairs Division, upgraded to the Putra Food Delivery for students on campus.

Muhammad Firdhaus has been appointed MPPUPM deputy vice-president (welfare and infrastructure) for the second term of the 2017/2018 academic session.

"I met my seniors to let them know that I was interested to contest in next election with Mahasiswa Putra. I contested within the Faculty of Design and Architecture, and at residential colleges — Kolej 10 and Kolej 11," said



Under the e-voting system, students are required to register their names before they cast their votes.



One of the students casting her vote to elect UM Student Representative Council members.

Muhammad Firdhaus.

"After fulfilling all the requirements I registered as a candidate. There were two days of campaigning. And, finally, on election day, I was assigned to monitor one of the election centres from 8am to 5pm. The results were announced at 6pm."

A screen displayed the results at his faculty. He was in second place, 10 votes behind. Only two candidates will represent each faculty as MPP members and Muhammad Firdhaus was one of them.

Meanwhile, Syaiful Asyraf's term as president is one year till the next election. Penggerak's manifestos included a free food programme, a 24-hour convenience

store, increasing the speed of UM WiFi access and a portal to publicise student activities.

"I contested in the campus election due to the encouragement of my seniors.

"I will use this platform to help students. Hopefully, we can fulfil at least 80 per cent of our manifestos within a term," said Syaiful Asyraf.

Adib Ashman is inspired to bring young people together and see student activism at UKM.

"With the manifesto We Hear Your Voices, the Aspirasi team gathered at UKM's Dataran Gemilang, singing and chanting in support of Aspirasi candidates.

"It was the most historic moment for me."