

ESSAY

KILLING THE "APATHY" MYTH

Photo by Sarajane Jagielski



GSB President Dan Mangan

During the interview process for a new university employee that I took part in this summer, I heard something discouraging. Candidates for the position were asked what they thought the biggest problem with student government was across the nation. Most of the time, the answer that came back was "apathy."

I was indignant. All of the problems of student governments anywhere, including Iowa State, were being reduced to apathy on the part of the student body. Someone is missing the point completely.

I believe that the problem is a lack of an intelligent approach to recruitment, not student apathy. Look at the Government of Student Body of the past, here at Iowa State. What's not to be apathetic about? Frankly, I'm surprised it has continued to survive at all, given the lackluster, mediocre way it has been run in the recent past. For the student government or anyone else to blame lack of participation on the students at large is silly. Give them something worth participating in, and participate they will! This year, we set out to prove this notion.

It seems that the first of many failures that the GSB encounters every year is its inability to fill all of the positions it has within its committees. GSB has a ten member cabinet, and also appoints more than a hundred students to about 35 different university committees. In the past, it has taken months to fill the cabinet, and the whole year to get all of the committees full. Student apathy? Nope, sorry: poor marketing, poor planning, and lack of direction on the part of the leadership.

As you could probably guess, marketing an organization like the GSB to students was not the easiest of tasks. "Come be part of a shamelessly hostile, embarrassed organization that has completely lost the respect of the

students!" was not the rallying cry we were looking for, even though it was probably the first one that came to mind. So we set about trying to pique the interest of every student we could get to, one by one, in any way that we could dream up.

In the first two weeks of school, we had four advertisements in the *Daily*, several posters on campus, fliers delivered to the president of every residence hall floor, fraternity, sorority and table tents in every dining area. Sound like overkill? That was just the beginning. We made announcements at the constituency meetings of all the major residence areas on campus, went to two different recruitment fairs and even did a spot on KCCQ radio (free of charge, of course).

The end result was about 20 applications for the cabinet, and about a hundred for the committees, which was several more than we needed. In the next two weeks we did interviews, found the best fit we could for everyone and made the appointments. We had taken on a task that the GSB of the past had been lucky to finish in several months, and done it in less than four weeks. And the most amazing thing of all was, it really wasn't that hard! Good marketing and some hard work was all it took.

Blaming lack of participation in GSB on student apathy is a cheap copout. The students of this university are winners and leaders. They are absolutely hungry for ways to get involved, if you take the time to approach them and explain what's involved. We demonstrated this in the first month of school. If you give students a reason to care about something, even student government, they will. But do not for one minute try to tell me that our students are apathetic. GSB is on the road to a wonderful future and a new beginning at Iowa State, all because students are not apathetic.

The future of Student Government at Iowa State is looking brighter every day. After languishing in the long shadow of years of ineffectiveness and inactivity, the GSB is bursting at the seams with excitement and renewal. As this year's new GSB executives, my vice-president Jennifer Sulentic and I promised an "alternative" to business as usual in the Student Government office. And with the help of a student body that is excited about change, this year has been a story of kept promises.

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