

To the students of Western Washington University,

Here is the decision process behind the AS Constitution amendment of Student Senate elections changing from Fall to Spring:

A brief history of the AS is that the Student Senate was *always* intended to hold Spring elections. In the Spring of three years ago, students voted with a 97% approval rate for a referendum (proposal) to create the Student Senate. Because it was a referendum that received at least 51% of approvals, this vote was a mandate by students to AS student leaders to create the Senate. As a result, those leaders planned for Senators to be elected as soon as possible in the next quarter - Fall 2018. However, the plan was *always* to have the Student Senate and Executive Board be equal branches who serve as checks and balances. This would be possible with both branches starting at the same time, training and working side by side. The first AS Senate Pro Tempore (Chair of the Student Senate) was focused on setting up the Senate, so he was unable to propose Spring elections. He passed this task on to the next Senate Pro Tempore, who was my Chair last year. She was focused on maintaining the Senate's livelihood, so she was unable to propose Spring elections successfully. While at least a 3/4 approval of the Student Senate is needed to pass such a proposal, the *majority* of Student Senators from last year still voted that elections should move to Spring. As I was elected the current Senate Pro Tempore, I was tasked by my predecessors and advisors to pursue this in my legacy document. Therefore, my co-leaders and I put it up to a vote for the student body in Fall 2020 elections as a referendum. The AS Executive Board unanimously voted to put the referendum on the ballot. The referendum passed with an *88% approval rate* (around 700 students voted yes), therefore it was a *mandate* again by students to the AS student leaders to pursue moving Senate elections from to Spring. Then, the Executive Board and Student Senate listened to those students and voted unanimously to put the AS Constitution amendment on the ballot this week. Different years of AS leadership disagree, and that's expected. That's what the rotating of student government terms and leadership is supposed to do. While only a majority of Senators agreed last year, all of them voted yes this year (at least 3/4), because they believe the pros outweigh the cons. That's how democratic processes operate. As the spokesperson of the Student Senate, it is my *official statement* that we are obligated to listen to those 700+ students and do our job. We cannot ignore that 88% approval vote, and this is why we put the AS Constitution amendment on the ballot this week. We have to let the majority of students speak. Our AS Constitution declares that we must listen to the majority - again, just as all democratic processes operate.

A constituent brought forth the concern that first year transfer students may be excluded by moving Senate elections to Spring. That issue was taken into consideration by the AS leadership for several months. This argument has the assumption that all transfer students enter in the Fall when many transfers still enter in Winter and Spring. Therefore, Fall elections may exclude Winter transfers, too. No one election timeline is perfect or "ideal," but the AS leadership decided - after weighing the pros and cons - that we must consider *all* 16,000 students who are not receiving representation for 5 months. In addition, we have been developing creative solutions to assuage that concern, creating another branch of the student government called the Student Union Board that starts in the Fall, which may have specific "transfer," "freshman," and/or "first year positions. In addition, we are working on other opportunities for them to still get involved before Spring elections, such as a First Year Student Committee that may act as an advisory branch to the Executive Board and Student Senate in their decision-making processes. This con to Spring elections is a "fixable" one, and we shouldn't sacrifice the representation for *all* 16,000 students when we can find solutions to include first year transfer students.

However, we cannot “fix” the con of not having representation for WWU students in the 5 months before Fall elections. In order to find out what election timeline will work for the Senate, it is necessary to make change and try out new methods. If we stay stagnant, then the Senate will not improve or fulfil its purpose of representing our constituents’ needs.

Finally, I have been directly addressed. However, this was not my idea; it has always been the plan to increase representation for *all* 16,000 students, so WWU will have student input the whole year. Also, *all* 24 of our current AS leaders unanimously voted for this proposal to be on the Fall 2020 and current ballot - not just me. It was everyone’s doing. In addition, I did my job, *because* the Fall 2020 referendum and my legacy document mandated me to do so. The Fall 2020 referendum is where voters could have stopped this idea and we would have closed the proposal, listening to our constituents either way. However, *it passed and we must progress forward*. Finally, please remember that student leaders are students, too.

#### Fall Elections:

##### Pros -

- Some first year transfer students (who start in the Fall) have the opportunity to run for office (However, this is based on the assumption that all transfer students start in the Fall.)
- It will cost less money (However, we have known about this for years and have been saving money to allow for Spring elections with NO extra cost to students or their fees.)
- It is less work for the Elections Coordinator (However, the EC stated that he isn’t bothered by this and is more bothered by the fact that he was hired one week before Senate elections. As a result, he didn’t know what he was doing, but would be more prepared with Spring elections and is officially in favor of it.)

##### Cons -

- *All* WWU students lack representation for 5 months, while admin and faculty made decisions for them. Imagine having no federal or state senators for 5 months. To name a few decision WWU made without students in Summer 2020:
  - WWU decided to extend the contract with Aramark in the Summer without the Senate’s input or student representation
  - An all white faculty committee was created to create a new GUR on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion without any BIPOC faculty or student input
  - WWU decided whether classes would be online or in person this year
- Dozens of Student Senators have testified that they do not feel adapted or situated in their positions until January. As a result, we do not make any tangible change until January to June. Therefore 7 months from June to January of student time and resources are wasted.
- This is a waste of student fee dollars, because students are paying for 8 months of representation and only receiving five months of it while Spring elections would ensure that all 12 months that are paid for are worth it (Summer would not only be for training, but also for networking with admin/faculty, getting to know the Executive Board, and collaborating with them to plan for the academic year.)
- Student Senators are not able to build relationships or network until January, while Spring elections would allow them to get to know Deans, admin, and faculty before Fall.
- There is an inequitable power imbalance and social dynamic between the Executive Board and Student Senate even though they are meant to be equal branches that serve as checks and balances, begin their terms at the same time, and work together.

- The AS Senate Pro Tempore is not able to schedule or appoint Student Senators to vital committees (Academic Coordinating Commission, Committee for Undergraduate Education, Faculty Senate, AS Finance Council, Sustainability Equity and Justice Fund, etc.) until they ask the Senators their schedules, meaning those committees are on hold until December or January.
- The AS Senate Pro Tempore, as the official representative of the Student Senate, must substitute for all 20 Senators from when the Chair's term starts (June) to when the Senators are elected (November) - 5 months. No *student* should have to unfairly overwork for 21 people, especially when many people who run for this position are BIPOC, disabled, first generation college students, and other marginalized students who don't have the capacity to do so.
- Student Senators would have to train for this position in the Fall when they are getting adjusted to the new academic year instead of Summer when they do not have school work (unless they are enrolled in Summer), allowing them to focus on more *efficient* training.

#### Spring Elections:

##### Pros -

- WWU students receive representation all year long, meaning faculty and admin won't be able to make decisions without their input.
- Student Senators are able to adapt and situate themselves in the Summer quarter.
- Student dollars would be spent more efficiently (investing in representation.)
- Student Senators can network with admin/faculty, build better relationships, and collaborate with the Executive Board on planning their priorities for the academic year.
- The Student Senate and Executive Board are closer in equity and a power balance.
- The AS Senate Pro Tempore can start committees faster due to scheduling.
- The AS Senate Pro Tempore does not have to substitute for 20 Student Senators.
- Student Senators can train in the Summer without having to worry about classes, allowing them to focus on the *quality* of efficient training rather (quality over quantity.)
- The Elections Coordinator is able to prepare for Senate elections rather than being thrown into Fall Elections a week after they are hired.
- The AS will be better prepared overall to have an effective student governance cohort.

##### Cons -

- Some first year transfer students (who start in the Fall) won't have the opportunity to run for office (However, this is based on the assumption that all transfer students start in the Fall. In addition, we are working on solutions to fix this con.)
- It will cost more money (However, we have known about this for years and have been saving money to allow for Spring elections with NO extra cost to students or their fees.)
- It is more work for the Elections Coordinator (However, the EC stated that he isn't bothered by this and is more bothered by the fact that he was hired one week before Senate elections. As a result, he didn't know what he was doing, but would be more prepared with Spring elections and is officially in favor of it.)

PLEASE NOTE: The AS is currently working on possibly allowing admitted students (incoming transfers, freshmen, and graduate students) to run for office. Admitted students are able to apply to AS jobs, so this may work. It is not a guarantee, but it is a possibility. The Office of Admissions could help with marketing to students who commit by May 1st to run since AS elections are for the full month of May.

Overall, the AS Executive Board and AS Student Senate believe that the pros of Spring elections benefitting *all* students outweigh the cons that can be addressed/fixed. I hope this document increases



Associated Students of  
Western Washington University  
Viking Union 504 – MS 9106  
516 High Street, Bellingham, WA 98225  
360-650-4648  
[as.wwu.edu/gov/senate](http://as.wwu.edu/gov/senate)

transparency on the process behind deciding to put Spring elections for the Student Senate on the ballot this week. In summary, this has been years in the making with much thought and consideration. We believe in democratic processes and the majority student vote. Thank you for taking the time to read this!

Sincerely,

Sargun Handa  
AS Senate Pro Tempore