

TechNews

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SINCE 1928

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TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59PM on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsiit.com.

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Letter from the Editor: Importance of SGA debates

By Karl Rybaltowski
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In the weeks following student government elections, I have gotten a few negative comments from students about our coverage of the SGA debates, specifically the profiles we provided of the different candidates in the March 29 edition of TechNews. These comments revolved around two themes - that we generally lacked objectivity in our candidate profiles and that the SGA debates were not a useful resource. I overwhelmingly received positive feedback, but for those with any doubts, I hope to adequately address these concerns by giving some insight into the process.

The SGA elections are a curious thing. They draw candidates with varying levels of experience in student government, the IIT community, and interaction with the administration. These may not be the only criteria for judging the candidates, but when two, three, even four people with a great deal of passion for improving IIT and advocating for students are all running for a single position, these things do become important. The SGA debates, co-hosted by TechNews and SGA, are a way to give all students some insight into what sets the candidates apart. They're also an opportunity for students with less publicity or - let's be honest

- popularity to stand on an equal footing with their opponents. Does popularity hurt a candidate in our eyes? Of course not, if they have the vision, plans, and experience to back it up.

We have two main goals in our involvement with the debates. First, we see what all the running knowledge we have of candidates who have been involved on campus before will equate to in terms of a platform. Second, we are brutal in trying to cut through platitudes, vague statements and dodging of questions we genuinely want answered. We look for substance in the debate performance, not style. Having moderated three SGA debates now, it has been my pleasure to see SGA become an ever-greater advocate for student concerns each year. On the flip side, this means that the stakes get ever higher for these positions - the bigger the role SGA plays, the more responsibility its executives have, and the more important it is that a really solid candidate fills each role. So we take the debates pretty seriously, and we hope the student body does, too. But we also have to be realistic.

Not everyone has the time to spend on the debates, and that's where TechNews comes in yet again. After the debates (where, for the past few years, we have had at least four staff present taking notes), our staff meets to discuss candidate performance. Between the candidate packets and the debates, we write up the

profiles that you see in the newspaper so that on election day, any student who has not been keeping up with things can make a more informed decision. Hard as it can be to believe, subjectivity does not enter into the process - not only because we take our role as a news outlet seriously, but because our concern is making sure students know what their candidates stand for, and where they may need to improve.

In past years, we've gone so far as to endorse candidates, a much more controversial practice. Given the very short election cycle and some issues of fairness (multiple candidates could not make it to the debates due to a conference, making it difficult for us to render a truly informed decision), the staff got together and decided to forgo the endorsement process this year. That doesn't mean we weren't going to be candid about our assessments of candidates' performance.

As the campus newspaper, our primary responsibility is, after all, to inform the students of IIT, hopefully empowering them to make the best decisions they can. That is our mindset at the debates, while writing profiles, and while covering the SGA election process for TechNews. We believe our readers expect and deserve no less, and we hope we did not disappoint.

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