

LSA SG hosts first debate in five years with a contested election of three tickets

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On Monday, the University of Michigan LSA Student Government hosted a candidate debate ahead of the upcoming election on March 27 and 28. Three presidential-vice presidential candidate tickets debated issues regarding community outreach, the LSA language requirement, inclusivity and diversity of the Assembly. The event consisted of eight questions asked by Michigan Daily Senior News Editor Remy Farkas, followed by questions from the audience. The questions, compiled by The Daily, included challenging the LSA SG budget, current resolutions and the SG's internal and external relations.

The 2019 LSA executive board elections are contested for the first time since 2014 with three tickets of a presidential and vice-presidential candidate: Brian Wang and Mary McKillop; Nicholas Bonde and Kevan Casson; and Jon Reid and Wyatt Puscas.

The debate began with opening statements from each ticket. LSA sophomore Mary McKillop said she would like to focus on creating a more representative government that listens to its constituents on her platform with Wang.

“We’re both extremely proud of the platform we put together and we hope the other students in LSA see the commitment we’re prepared to bring,” McKillop said. “We also believe that the government itself deserves to be more represented by people who understand the common issues on campus, not just by those who say they want to fix things on campus. We fail as representatives if we don’t show that we understand the needs of our constituents and we hope that throughout the debate, you could hear who is more prepared to handle tough issues and represent the needs of the college.”

LSA junior Nicholas Bonde said an important part of his ticket’s platform is recruitment, government policy and increasing student familiarity with resources like the LSA Opportunity Hub.

Bonde also discussed the importance of educating students about the resources available to them like the LSA Opportunity Hub.

“We’re also very excited to share with you our vision for next year so we see the government as a resource for other students to connect with any sort of student organizations, administrators or other University institutions on campus,” Bonde said.

LSA junior Kevan Casson said she and Bonde have a lot of previous experience and she hopes to use their experience to demonstrate their excitement and passion for LSA SG.

“Through our combined six years of experience, we have seen the LSA student body, we’ve seen every student become very passionate and exciting and everyone in LSA student government is so driven,” Casson said. “We know the potential of this government inside and out and that’s why it’s so exciting to be running for your next president and vice president.”

LSA junior Wyatt Puscas said his ticket’s main platform points include increasing campus sustainability and awareness, access to University health resources and the fairness and academic policy of the college.

LSA junior Jon Reid discussed how the other candidates talked about diversity initiatives, but said he and his running mate have a tangible idea to fix the problem.

“Our government is a representative body and both Wyatt and I believe it’s time to give a voice to those students on campus who we’ve not reached out to yet,” Reid said. “Students should not fall in line with what our projects are, our projects should fall in line with what students want and if elected, Wyatt and I will make sure to make an active effort to do this with an outreach coordinator position and with our projects that are both externally and internally focused.”

Reid added he would like to focus on mental health in regards to the recent false active shooter incident and how he felt there weren’t enough resources available for students.

“This is something that’s very near and dear to my heart, especially with the event on Saturday — very traumatizing,” Reid said. “We need better access to mental health resources for all students.”

One topic brought up was the policy to allow LSA students to take their last semester language requirement pass/fail. LSA SG passed a resolution to work toward implementing this policy on Feb. 20.

Bonde said the resolution puts less pressure on students who may not be as proficient in learning new languages.

“I’m very proud of everybody that worked towards passing this resolution to make sure that the students who may not be as ... knowledgeable to taking a language — that way they can possibly even explore a class that they may never have imagined taking or just take a pass/fail because they want to,” Bonde said.

Wang said it’s important to listen to multiple perspectives in order to move forward with the resolution.

“It’s really important for us to understand both sides and to eventually have speakers on both sides come in to explain to our reps who vote at the end of the day to really understand why it is the way it is and why it should change,” Wang said.

Reid agreed with Wang and said some language departments have been against the resolution because some students may not participate enough. He added it would be important to find a faculty member who would be willing to make a motion.

“I think the next steps for what we should do with this piece of legislation is we need to address the concerns from a lot of the different language departments, most notably the Romance Language Department,” Reid

said. “There’s a big concern about, kind of, it’s a collaborative-based class. There is concern from the Romance Language Department and I believe, to a smaller degree, the German Department about kind of what a student taking pass/fail, on what degree you would really collaborate, he or she would collaborate in class. So, I think we need to kind of try to ease these concerns and hear them out.”

Each ticket then discussed their experience with the Budget Allocations Committee, which holds between \$25,000 and \$32,000 of the LSA SG budget each semester. Wang said while he has personally not been able to attend many BAC meetings, he believes understanding how the budget is allocated is extremely important to LSA SG leadership positions. He noted LSA SG’s responsibility to act as an objective source of funding.

“Anytime we see one that comes up that might be questionable to how we partake as a non-biased, non-partisan organization or as an organization that wants to give a certain board, you know, more than a grand more than or just around \$2,000, which is our upper limit, we want to understand what those orgs are doing with that money, how they are benefiting LSA students,” Wang said. “But more importantly, we want to work on having more members understand where that money is going and having them partake in those events that are fully accessible to LSA students.”

Casson and Bonde agreed with Wang and McKillop and discussed the importance of understanding where the money is going. While Casson said she was unable to attend a great deal of BAC meetings this year, Bonde attended many and thinks being aware of BAC’s actions demonstrates LSA SG’s dedication to supporting all student organizations.

“It is good to see how BAC funds different students or already knows about us on campus,” Bonde said. “And for me, it’s also good to know about the different events that we, as a government, that are funding to show that we really are advocating for all students interested, all students’ interest and we are actively seeking their voices.”

Puscas responded by speaking about his own involvement on the committee and said an integral part of his and Reid’s platform is encouraging a deeper understanding of what student organizations the funds go to. Puscas said he also sees potential for BAC to provide an avenue for increased outreach and communication with other organizations on campus and hopes to become more involved in the promotion of LSA events.

“We need to make sure we’re being proper stewards of all that money, and really engaging with where it’s going,” Puscas said. “And that it is meeting our mission and the mission of the college while benefiting other student organizations to the maximum effect. So, I see this as a great gateway for us to expand our outreach to student organizations. I’d love for us to start advertising events that we’re funding as well.”

Diversity and representation of minority communities on LSA SG was a topic of controversy throughout the debate. While all tickets advocated for increased inclusion, they had different ideas for how to achieve it.

Wang discussed how LSA SG is meant to be a resource for the student body, and right now it is not representative of its constituents. McKillop said part of their platform includes making an effort to not only reach out to other communities, but to go to them and show they really do want to represent all voices.

“I think that’s been a big issue with Student Government in the past, is that we invited people to things but, honestly an email isn’t very much motivation to get involved in an organization,” McKillop said. “And so I think that in order to be fair to all students, we need to show that we are there for people, we’re showing up in spaces and looking to represent everyone.”

Casson said her and Bonde’s platform includes semester-long recruitment rather than just at specific points throughout the year in order to show LSA SG’s conscious commitment to fostering more diverse representation.

“We believe that with a body of over 17,000 students of all races, ethnicities, religions, backgrounds and so forth, we need to have a student body that represents, or a governmental body that represents them,” Casson said. “And the only way to do that is to expand our recruitment process to not just the beginning or end of each semester, but throughout the entire semester, or the entire school year ... Increasing diversity in the government is the only way we can truly represent our students.”

Reid said he and Puscas have the only achievable idea for increasing diversity. Their idea is to create an outreach position, someone dedicated to increasing the diversity of voices heard by LSA SG.

“I firmly believe in the outreach (coordinator) position to give a voice to these underrepresented communities,” Reid said. “We really want to try to bring a lot of their issues to the forefront of our campaign, and that is what we will do if elected. So, we need a dedicated position for this because it’s so important, I believe almost every single elected candidate agrees that this is a huge issue. But I think, in reality, we’re the only ones with a tangible idea as to how to actually facilitate bringing in these diverse underrepresented communities into our company.”

McKillop responded by discussing the importance of diversity in LSA SG, and one person does not have the abilities to successfully include and represent the entire LSA population.

“One thing I want to address: One person cannot be representative of every population on this campus. And so I think that having one person as being solely responsible for reaching out to every underrepresented group in

LSA is unrealistic,” McKillop said. “And so I think that saying that we are going to send someone who cannot possibly represent every single identity, because that’s not possible for anybody, into every diverse student org space is just not attainable and a little bit tokenizing, honestly.”

Regardless of the result of the election, all candidates discussed their passion for LSA SG and urged students to exercise their right to vote.

“I think the biggest sentiment that I want to convey is that we’ve mentioned civic engagement previously, but it’s really important that all of you vote no matter who you’re voting for,” Puscas said. “Encourage your friends to vote — we really want to get as many LSA students participating in the election as possible.”

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