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Serious debate after Harvard 'joke election'

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF | DECEMBER 10, 2013

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How best to stir the pot of Harvard University's student government? Demand daily tomato basil ravioli soup, of course.

What started as a key campaign promise, along with thicker toilet paper, of two candidates mounting a "joke ticket" this fall has ended up sparking a serious debate on campus about how best to improve the council that represents undergraduates.

To the surprise of many students, Harvard juniors and roommates Sam Clark and Gus Mayopoulos won the Harvard Undergraduate Council election 2½ weeks ago, with about 43 percent of the vote, beating out two other tickets with serious agendas. The droll duo, who ran on a campaign slogan of "You Could

Do Worse,” did not expect to win and had no intention of taking office.

So, just after the results came in, they announced they would quickly resign.

But Mayopoulos had a change of heart. On Sunday, he was inaugurated as the 17th president of the council.

“I thought I could leverage the excitement we had generated during the election into new energy at the UC,” he said.

Now, he is hoping to counter apathy among many students who believe the body — which distributes funding for extracurricular activities, among other duties — is not representing them and that it cannot get anything done.

“I see my primary goal as someone to reconnect the UC with the students and the students with the UC, so it’s not two groups that don’t really understand each other,” Mayopoulos said Monday.

Clark stuck to his plan and resigned because he said he had too many other commitments.

Through an internal vote, the council filled the vacancy of vice president, electing junior Sietse Goffard, who ran as part of a ticket that finished in second place.

Like many around Harvard, Goffard said he had not viewed Clark and Mayopoulos as serious competition. “They made me laugh,” he said.

The duo was photographed wearing matching glittery, golden hoodies during an interview with the Harvard Crimson newspaper.

They recruited an army of friends to plaster the campus with posters pledging to tackle “the tough issues, like divesting from gender-neutral weekend shuttles.”

Their victory disappointed and frustrated Goffard, who had invested much time and energy in campaigning.

“My frustration was directed not toward them; it was never Sam and Gus,” Goffard said. “Through their satire, they pointed out a lot of problems within the UC that many people were disillusioned by.

“It meant that something must have been wrong about the way we were doing things,” added



Goffard, who has served other roles on the council since freshman year.

Mayopoulos has no prior experience on the council. He and Goffard say they have similar goals and expect their different backgrounds will be an asset, not a hindrance.

They said the joke campaign and its surprising success mean that more attention is being paid to the council, particularly by students who had previously ignored student government issues.

"I think we have an unbelievable opportunity," Mayopoulos said. "The students, alumni, the administration, and the UC are looking at us to see how we can turn what some people might see as a disaster and a collapse into something positive."

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