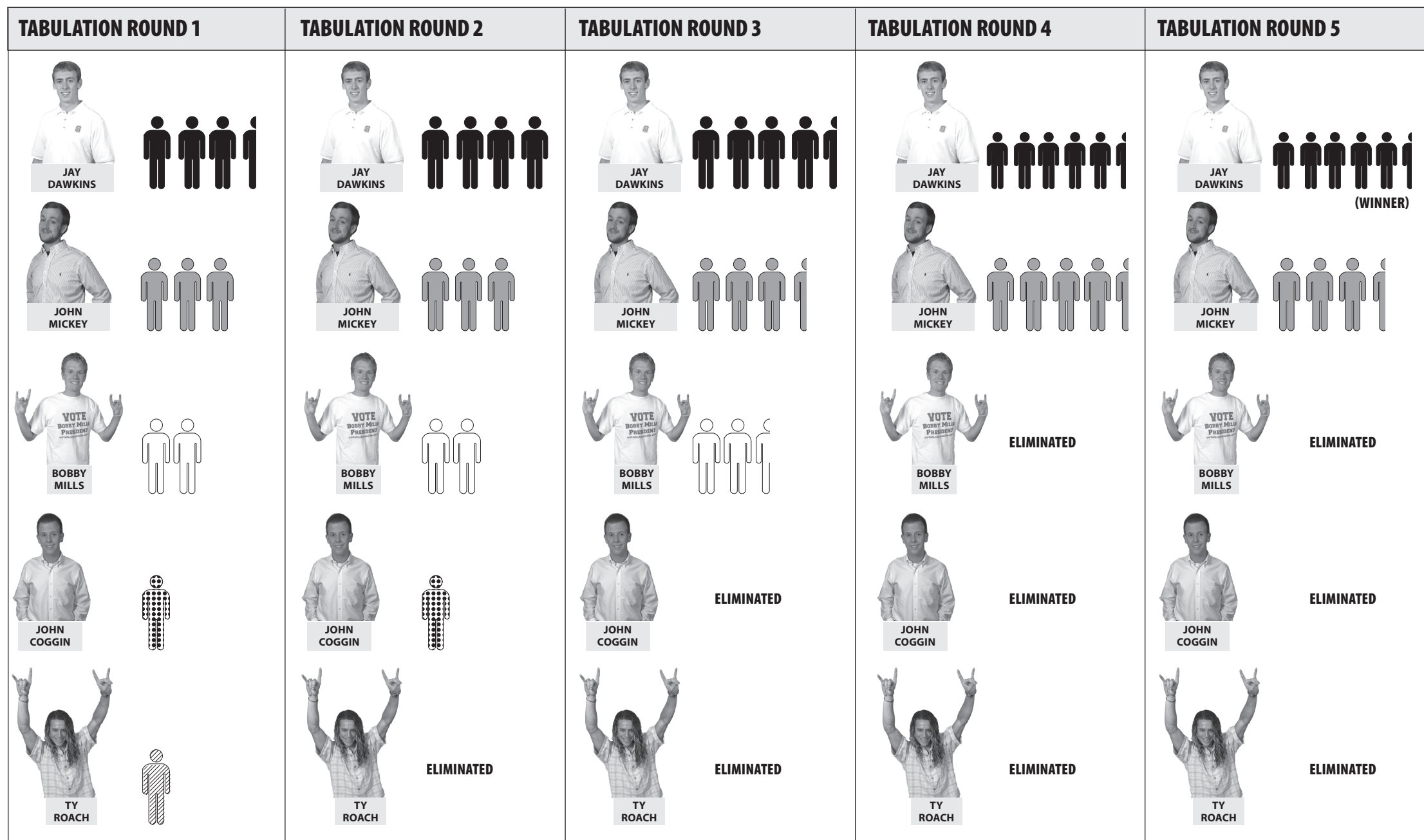


Breaking down the system



GRAPHIC BY HELEN DEAR

Each figure represents about 10 percent of the students who voted for each candidate in the 2008 spring student body elections, which implemented the instant runoff voting system for the first time. When a candidate is eliminated in a round, his or her votes are redistributed among the other candidates in the next round, based on their candidate rankings. Although the tabulations for round four and five are the same, the IRV system automatically runs through a fifth tabulation to eliminate the final competitor before the winner is selected.

CANDIDATES ASSESS INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING SYSTEM IMPLEMENTED WITH THE SPRING'S STUDENT BODY ELECTIONS

STORY BY SAJA HINDI | PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEPHEN BATEMAN & ROB FISHER

Instant Runoff Voting is a system that has been adopted in several statewide races across the nation, 37 colleges and universities and, this year, N.C. State's student body elections.

Presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain have even endorsed IRV in some state primaries.

Voters rank each of the candidates listed for a position in order of preference, and one candidate is eliminated in each round until a single candidate receives 51 percent or more of the votes. If a voter's top choice is eliminated in the first round, then his or her first choice becomes the candidate ranked second, and so forth.

According to Adam Compton, a senior in agricultural business management and the student senator who sponsored the bill to adopt IRV, this system allows students' votes to count for more.

"The idea of Instant Runoff Voting is to be able to vote who you want to see win" even if they don't have a high chance of winning without throwing away your vote, he said.

"You're able to pick your candidate [who you want to win] instead of picking the lesser of two evils," Compton said.

This process, according to Compton, eliminates the hassle of another week of campaigning before a runoff election unless there is a "dead tie."

The system elicited differing views from the candidates running for student body president.

"At the heart of what IRV stands for, it makes a lot of great sense to me. But a lot of people tried to 'trick' the system. That's not the point," said John Mickey, a junior in business management who ran for student body president this spring.

"The point is to truly rank your preference in candidates and to get an accurate picture of who you feel would be the best [for

the position]."

But Mickey said he didn't think it worked that way.

"A lot of people tried to strategically beat the system and it sort of fumbled over itself," he said.

Compton said trying to trick the system was not really effective, because even if some students voted one candidate as their top choice because they didn't think that person would win, that candidate would still get eliminated before the final round.

Bobby Mills, the incumbent candidate for student body president this spring, said he did not think the system was effective.

"The ranking system is going to hurt any incumbent in a single person race... because people are going to vote that person last," Mills, a junior in political science, said.

After the Elections Commission announced the results though, Mills ranked third.

The last time Student Government avoided a runoff election for student body president was in 2004-2005, when only two candidates ran for the position.

Five candidates ran for student body president this year and if it weren't for IRV, candidates Jay Dawkins and Mickey would have had to go into a runoff election.

But because of the implementation of IRV, Dawkins, a junior in civil engineering, won the election without the added week of campaigning and additional voting.

Spring student body president candidate Ty Roach, a senior in biological sciences, said he did not fully understand how the system worked.

"I wasn't really sure why they dropped the bottom man out every time," he said. "I thought it should be the top two and then drop everyone out."

Roach also said requiring students to rank all five candidates was not a good idea because many students voted randomly if they were only informed about a few of the candidates.

"A lot of people say 'I voted for so and so,' and just went down the list," he said.

Candidate John Coggin, on the other hand, thought the runoff voting system was beneficial, although he said it could use some changes to make it more fair.

"A runoff favors the people who have the resources to keep on campaigning, so the low socio-economic classes wouldn't be able to participate in that," he said.

"But also, the students get sick of it. I'm glad with one vote, it

2008 SPRING GENERAL ELECTION REFERENDA

Tabulation Round 1
 Jay Dawkins 2,480
 John Mickey 1,931
 Bobby Mills 1,266
 John Coggin 645
 Ty Roach 605

Tabulation Round 2
 Jay Dawkins 2,690
 John Mickey 2,066
 Bobby Mills 1,438
 John Coggin 733
 Ty Roach 0

Tabulation Round 3
 Jay Dawkins 2,952
 John Mickey 2,376
 Bobby Mills 1,599
 John Coggin 0
 Ty Roach 0

Tabulation Round 4
 Jay Dawkins 3,858
 John Mickey 3,069
 John Coggin 0
 Bobby Mills 0
 Ty Roach 0

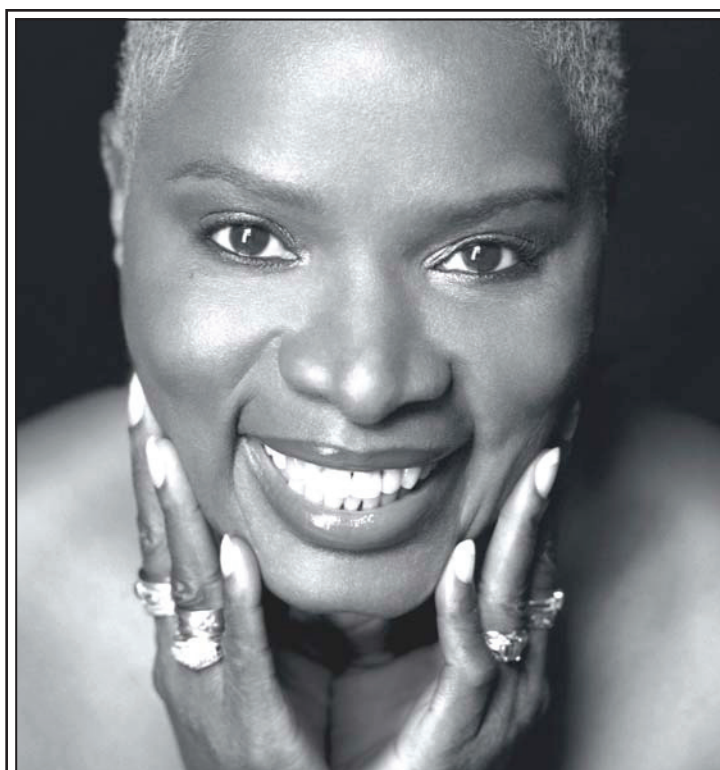
Tabulation Round 5
 Jay Dawkins 3,858
 John Mickey 3,069
 John Coggin 0
 Bobby Mills 0
 Ty Roach 0

SOURCE: STUDENTS.NCSU.EDU

can all be over." Dawkins said he felt the same way.

"It served the students well because they don't have to be constantly voting and the candidates don't have to campaign for another week and litter campus for another week," he said.

In the spring elections, 6,927 students voted in the student body president elections and out of the 1,484 students who took the exit poll survey, 78.3 percent said they would vote in elections again.



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