

Before March's By-election, Kyung Hee Faces Two Threats to Student Democracy: Apathy and Misconduct



Proxy voting

Photo: The Korea Economic Daily (hankyung.com)

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Indifference—or at least a lack of basic conscience—comes to mind when reviewing recent student elections at Kyung Hee University (KHU). KHU enters the March by-election season with a familiar problem: student governance is struggling to find legitimacy. On the Seoul Campus, the General Student Association (GSA) election was invalidated due to irregularities, while on the Global Campus, the vote never took place because no candidates registered, leaving both campuses without elected student representatives. Notably, similar problems have happened repeatedly in the past, underscoring the need for restoring a fair election process and rebuilding student participation ahead of the March by-election.

Lack of Participation, a Persistent Problem in Student Elections

The most notable outcome of the 2026 Global Campus GSA was that it never took place due to the absence of candidates. Under the Global Campus *Election Rules* (ER), students intending to run must complete registration within the period designated by the Central Election Management Committee (CEMC). However, no one registered during the registration period, leaving the election invalid. As a result, the GSA is operating under an Emergency Response Committee (ERC) system until March.

The same pattern appeared in the college-level student associations. According to data from the Global Campus

“Low participation is not the only risk. Electoral misconduct remains a persistent challenge for KHU and should not be viewed as a problem limited to a single campus.”

CEMC, three colleges—the College of Electronics & Information, the College of Applied Science, and the College of International Studies—had no candidates and therefore failed to elect the student representatives, meaning roughly 30 percent of colleges did not hold elections.

This outcome is in contrast to last year's election outcome. In the 2025 Global Campus GSA election, both the Core and Linkhu campaign headquarters had a rare energetic race. Each side recruited more than 100 members and campaigned actively. In response to the heightened competition, the CEMC and KHU Media also held two public hearings, further intensifying the atmosphere.

Consistent with the GSA election, the same pattern appeared at the college level. In 2025, all 10 colleges fielded candidates in every electoral unit. Voting proceeded normally, and every constituency elected its representative, with no unit shifting to an ERC system. In this sense, that revival of student self-governance faded within a single year.

This lack of participation is not limited to the Global Campus. In the 2025 Seoul Campus election, the GSA also transitioned to an ERC after no candidates registered. It was the first time this had happened in seven years, and it placed

KHU among five of Seoul's 17 major universities—along with Hanyang University, the University of Seoul, Korea University, and Kookmin University—operating without an elected student representative.

Overall, this pattern suggests that apathy toward student self-governance is not a temporary issue on one campus but a broader structural problem that can emerge across university communities.

Even with Participation, Misconduct Can Break Legitimacy

Low participation is not the only risk. The 2026 Seoul Campus GSA election initially raised expectations. The KnowHow and KHU:EST campaign headquarters both entered the race, producing the first electoral competition election in three years. The candidate hearing was also conducted in a debate format, further intensifying the competitive atmosphere.

However, those expectations quickly turned into disappointment following allegations of fraud. On counting day, a student from the School of Dance reported that a vote had been cast under its name despite not voting. In response, KHU:EST conducted an investigation and confirmed that proxy voting had in fact occurred. CCTV footage from the polling station showed that, while election officials were absent, a CEMC campaign member completed identity verification using another student's ID number and cast a ballot. Records also revealed that the individual entered the polling booth eight times during the voting period.

As a result, the election was invalidated and the Seoul Campus GSA, like the Global Campus, transitioned to an ERC until the March by-election, demonstrating that even a revitalized student election can still fail due to the shadow of misconduct.

Global Campus Also Faced Misconduct Disputes

The controversy over election misconduct is not new. In last year's Global Campus GSA election, a “spy incident” emerged during the competition between Core and Linkhu. According to the CEMC meeting minutes, a Linkhu member recruited a student inside Core to obtain campaign information. KakaoTalk chat records showed that Linkhu's design team leader collected information through the student—including the campaign staff list, campaign name, logo,

and executive structure—and also attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain details about campaign pledges. Messages such as “the seniors said they would buy you drinks after the election” also suggested offers of entertainment in return.

As a result, the CEMC investigated the case and issued disciplinary measures. The meeting minutes stated that the Linkhu campaign headquarters violated *Article 58 of the Global Campus ER* and received sanctions, including a public apology and suspension of campaign activities.

Similar misconduct also occurred in the College of Foreign Language & Literature election that same year. According to the election objection record from last year, Geumeum alleged that a member of the college election committee assisted Hear by managing duty schedules and encouraging students to vote for them. This claim was supported by KakaoTalk chat records exchanged between a Hear campaign member and the committee member.

Given that the margin of victory was only around 10 votes, Geumeum argued that the committee had not merely violated the rules governing fair elections in a procedural sense, but had directly influenced the election outcome. The dispute subsequently escalated into prolonged proceedings, including calls to impeach the elected Hear leadership and to invalidate the election results.

However, the way Geumeum raised its objections also became problematic, further intensifying the controversy. According to Hear's statement, a member of Geumeum photographed personal information during a public hearing without consent and allegedly accessed a KakaoTalk account on the same laptop after the user had left. Because the Global Campus *ER* did not contain an explicit clause allowing punishment for such conduct, Hear stated that it would consider pursuing separate legal action. No further updates have been publicly disclosed.

What March Needs to Prove

The upcoming March by-election will test two things: whether students are willing to run, and whether election systems can protect basic fairness. Because the issue is not confined to a single campus, it warrants closer attention from the University community. As both campuses approach the March by-election, this is a time for the community to take greater responsibility to ensure participation and fairness.



Public hearing for Core and Linkhu

Photo: Global Campus V.O.U. Instagram (@vou_khu)