

UVSS Electoral Report Fall 2015 Referendum

November 28, 2015

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Introduction

The University of Victoria's Student Society Elections Office, as dictated by the Electoral Policy Manual, submits this 2015 UVSS Electoral Report. The UVSS Elections Office is comprised of four electoral officers and this year we added a promoter to our roster:

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) – Emma Hamill

Senior Deputy Electoral Officer (SDEO) – Kelly Clark

Deputy Electoral Officers (DEOs) – Greg Atkinson and Arianna Rumenovich

Promoter- Natalia Karpovskaia

The Elections Office would like to thank the UVSS Board of Directors, the Electoral Committee, and all UVSS staff, especially Dale Robertson, Erin Ewart, Carmen Barrett, and Terri Tan for their tireless support. Thank you to CFUV and the Martlet for supporting the needs of students by publicizing elections information and events. The Office also acknowledges Cassbreaa Dewis, and Blake Rose of the University Secretary's Office for their assistance and for the administration of the WebVote system.

The Elections Office would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the candidate during the referendum and their third part endorsers, for promoting and embodying fair and transparent student politics.

The following report outlines the official results of the referendum, a financial statement, and suggestions to improve the efficiency and/or fairness of the election. It highlights issues that occurred, how they were dealt with and suggestions of how they can be prevented in the future.

SUMMARY

The 2015 UVSS Referendum was concluded successfully. Few issues arose during the election and were all resolved.

The Electoral Policy Manual (EPM) generally acted as an effective guiding framework from which to conduct the election, adjudicate policy, and make decisions.

1. Question

“Do you support an increase to the student fee for UVic Pride in the amount of 74¢ per semester for full-time students, and 37¢ per semester for part-time students, for the purposes of expanding accessible resource initiatives, such as safer sex, harm reduction, and trans and queer services/supplies?”

The UVSS Board of Directors endorsed this question. It is important to note that, while the policy outlines that the Board is permitted to endorse a referendum question and give the proponent or opponent access to UVSS resources, this does not constitute as an official third party endorsement. As is the case with all other endorsements, should a referendum proponent or opponent want to advertise that he or she is endorsed by the UVSS Board of Directors, a Third Party Endorsement form must be submitted to and approved by the Election Office.

2. Major Changes

At the Fall 2014 Annual General Meeting, the membership voted to amend the Constitution and Bylaws in regards to referendum questions. Section 4.7.d was changed. The parameters for a referendum to pass were changed from five percent (5%) of the voting body to a quorum of “fifteen percent (15%) of the voting membership.” This was the first Fall referendum to be affected by this change.

3. Elections Office

Former DEO Emma Hamill returned to the Elections office as Chief Electoral Officer (CEO). Kelly Clark was hired as Senior Deputy Electoral Officer (SDEO). After the position for Deputy Electoral Officer was reposted twice, Greg Atkinson and Arianna Rumenovich were hired as DEOs. In order to prepare for the 2016 Spring Election, Natalia Karpovskaia was hired as a promoter.

The SDEO and DEOs were responsible for carrying out the day-to-day operations, preparing for the cote and resolving disputes informally. The CEO's main responsibilities included dispute resolution, providing advice on policy interpretation and leading the office in its day-to-day tasks

4. Nominations

The Elections office received one [1] proponent form and one [1] opponent form by the close of the nominations period on November 5, 2015 at 4:00pm PST. Both forms were accepted as valid. The list of accepted candidates was posted on November 5, 2015 to both the UVSS Elections Office door and the UVSS Elections Office website.

On November 6, 2015 the opponent withdrew his nomination, which was accepted by the Elections Office. The student body was notified of their withdrawal as we posted it on the Elections Office door and website.

5. Formal Complaints

The Elections Office did not receive any formal complaints during the referendum period.

6. Appeals

Elections Adjudicator, Randy Parker, and the Arbitration Panel, comprised of Karen Potts, Matt Watters, and Ron Yee, returned for a fifth year. The CEO corresponded with the Elections Adjudicator and the Arbitration Panel to review the electoral timeline and the complaints process. The correspondence focused on complaint preparation and informal conflict resolution as key goals.

7. Online Voting

Voting was conducted using UVic's WebVote System, administered through the University Secretary's Office. This was the fourth year WebVote was employed in a referendum, having also been used in six spring elections.

The WebVote system was updated this year, the procedures remained the same but the appearance of the website changed. Online polls for the 2015 Fall Referendum opened at 9:00am PST as per schedule. Included in the ballot, the WebVote system highlighted that a 2/3 vote was required to pass. This information was incorrect. The UVSS Constitution and Bylaws (found on our website uvsselections.com/policy) clearly states Bylaw 3. 1. "Membership fees may be altered by a majority vote of a referendum." As per Bylaw 4.7.d "Quorum for a referendum shall be fifteen percent [15%] of the voting membership." Therefore, of fifteen percent of the student body, 50.01% of voters must vote in favour of a referendum for it to pass.

Once the mistake on the WebVote ballot was brought to the attention of the Elections Office, the University's administration was contacted to make the change. The ballot was changed to the correct requirement of majority vote as per Bylaw 3.1.

8. The Polling Period

Polls opened at 9:00 am PST November 26, 2015 and closed at 9:00 am PST November 27, 2015. Eight pollsitters used seven Netbook laptops to staff polling stations at various locations on campus. In addition, significant time and energy was dedicated to hand-billing and promotional work in order to increase student awareness and promote the use of online voting.

9. Voter Turnout

3069 students out of a possible 18,106 eligible voters, for a turnout rate of 16.95%

10. Referendum Results

Question: Do you support an increase to the student fee for UVic Pride in the amount of 74¢ per semester for full-time students, and 37¢ per semester for part-time students, for the purposes of expanding accessible resource initiatives, such as safer sex, harm reduction, and trans and queer services/supplies? **FAILED**

45.8% in favour, 54.2% opposed, 4 spoilt ballots.

11. Post Election

Section 5.5.c in our Electoral Policy states “Candidates must submit copies of receipts for all of their campaign expenditures to the Senior Deputy Electoral Officer by no later than 7:00 p.m. on election date, and certify in writing that they have not exceeded the campaign spending limit. A candidate who exceeds the campaign spending limit or fails to submit copies of their receipts or to certify in writing that the limit has not been exceeded must be disqualified by the Chief Electoral Officer.” Based on recommendations submitted by the Spring 2015 Elections team, the election date was interpreted as the day of physical polling (November 26, 2015). This interpretation was practiced in order to allow for candidates to submit receipts before the results were made, to avoid instances where unsuccessful candidates would not submit their receipts and face disqualification. The Elections Office believes this interpretation ensures a more fair and democratic elections process. The candidate submitted their receipts on time and did not exceed spending limits.

Section 5.9.c in our Electoral Policy states “Candidates must remove all posted campaign material from the campus by midnight on the election day.” Again, we encouraged the candidate to remove posted campaign materials by 11:59:59 pm on physical polling day (November 26, 2015).

ELECTION PLANNING

The Elections Office worked with the Electoral Committee to ensure that any updates to policy were correctly reflected in the planning of elections and voting. The Elections Office created an open avenue of communication with both the Electoral Committee and the Appeals Members, which consisted of the Elections Adjudicator and Arbitration Panel. This provided a transparent and safe environment for continued improvement of Elections Office operations.

The CEO updated the Appeals Members and the Electoral Committee on a regular basis after the close of nominations and the start of the campaign period, to ensure prompt planning of electoral events and deadlines.

NECESSARY FORMS

Providing all necessary elections forms online, including the Candidate's Handbook, nomination forms, and other essential documentation, streamlined the activities of both the candidates and Electoral Officers.

The online submissions contributed to the efficiency in communication between the candidates and the Elections Office. As well, this provided an electronic record of complaints or concerns as they occurred.

DATES, TIMELINE, AND EVENTS

The election timeline was set by the CEO and Board, in discussion with the University Secretary's Office. It was as follows:

Call for Nominations: October 22, 2015 at 9:00am PST

Nominations Open: October 29, 2015 at 9:00am PST

Nominations Close: November 5, 2015 at 4:00pm PST

All Candidates Meeting: November 16, 2015 from approximately 5:00pm-8:00pm PST

Campaign Period Begins: November 18, 2015 at 9:00am PST

Poll sitter Training: November 19, 2015 from approximately 5:00pm-8:00pm PST

Candidates Forum and Q&A: November 23, 2015 from 3:00pm- 6:00pm PST in SUB Upper Lounge

Voting Opens: November 26, 2015 at 9:00am PST

Campaign Expenditure Reports due: November 26, 2015 at 7:00pm PST

Removal of Campaign Materials: November 26, 2015 at 11:59pm PST

Voting Closes: November 27, 2015 at 9:00am PST

THE VOTERS LIST AND ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility to vote is set by the UVSS by-laws as "all currently registered undergraduate students and student enrolled in certificate and diploma programs at the University of Victoria." The student must also be in good standing with the students' society, as per the Constitution and Bylaws 2.1.a and 2.1.d.

Parameters are now in place for the University database system, to adequately create an updated voters list. Some individuals who pay UVSS fees are not recognized within the Banner System: first-year Island Medical Program (IMP) students in their second or third semester of studies, second-year IMP students, third- and fourth-year IMP students who have opted into the UVSS, and all STEPS Forward program participants. This required substantial collaboration with the University Secretary's Office, the STEPS Forward program, and IMP.

As a precautionary measure to ensure an accurate and up-to-date voters list, collaboration with the UVSS Info Booth was required to add students who opted-in. This updated list was sent to the University Secretary's Office. In the future, it is recommended that the UVSS collect NetLink ID information from all students who opt in to the UVSS, for the purposes of being able to quickly add them to the voters list.

CAMPAIGNING

2. All-Candidates Orientation

The Elections Office hosted an All-Candidates Orientation, to meet with candidates prior to the start of campaigning. The purpose of this event was to review policy, outline candidates' responsibilities and obligations, ensure a fair election process, and help candidates avoid any potential for campaign infractions. It also gave the candidates an opportunity to ask questions and meet the Elections Office.

The meeting was led by the CEO, with further participation by the SDEO and DEOs. Copies of the Candidates Handbook and University Poster Regulations were handed out.

3. Martlet Supplement

The elections supplement, which the Elections Office compiles for publication in The Martlet, continues to be an extremely useful communication tool. A full-page ad was used to highlight important information on the Elections Office and referendum. Additionally, a half page ad was used for the candidate platform. In addition to the distribution by the Martlet, copies were used at polling stations and for promotional work as a resource for students in preparation for voting. The supplement was also posted on the Elections Office website at the start of the campaigning period.

4. All-Candidates Forum

The All Candidates Forum was held on November 23, 2015 at 4:30 pm PST. Audience turnout was mainly made up of candidates and their supporters. The SDEO and DEOs moderated the forum and the Question and Answer sessions. With only one candidate we asked them whether or not they would be interested in the forum, and at their request organized it.

The candidate presented their three-minute speech as indicated in the electoral policy. Following their speech a question and answer period took place. The forum lasted a total of

13 minutes. With such little turn out and such a short agenda, the elections office recommends that forums not be held for referenda that only have one candidate.

6. Advertising

The Elections Office took advantage of the traditional methods of advertising (posters, banners, and handbills) to raise awareness of the election. In addition, advertising and promotion of the Elections Office was done through pollsitter engagement, emails sent to every eligible voter through the University Secretary's office, CFUV ads, the Martlet Supplement, and through the Elections Office's social media outlets; these included our WordPress website and our official Facebook page. The purpose of using different social media platforms was to connect with the student body in as many ways as possible.

7. Online Content

Candidates and slates have continued to use websites and Facebook as a platform for campaigning. For this election, the referendum proponent was able to reach to hundreds of followers on their social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube). This created a significant reach and would support the idea of digital campaigning and its popularity with candidates. With this, we are also recognizing non-candidates becoming active online to support campaigns of either the election process, slates as a whole, or individual candidates.

The Elections Office supports increased campaigning using the digital world. This may help reduce the amount of paper waste from traditional campaign activities, as well as help reach more students through connections with faculty, department, club, and course union groups. With this change, it would be highly beneficial to investigate how this type of campaign activity could be guided by the EPM, and whether amendments should be made to the EPM to accommodate for these new ways of campaigning to ensure fair campaigning practices.

8. Methods of Campaigning

This referendum period saw a lot of support between the proponent and on campus groups. Visual campaigning was huge since the referendum question had third party endorsements; they were able to do a lot of tabling by the fountain, inside the SUB and outside as well. Classic campaigning methods were very popular this election period, including chalking, hand billing, classroom talks, postering, and videos.

On Election day, UVic facilities contacted the Elections Office concerning vertical chalking at the Petch Fountain. Our policy states chalking is allowed on outdoor concrete surfaces that are "weathered." These vertical surfaces were in a weathered area, however facilities asked us to remove the chalking. The candidate was contacted and removed the chalking of concern.

THE ELECTION

1. Polling Stations

Nine polling stations were set up on November 26, 2015, open for a total of 40 hours between the hours of 9:00 AM and 9:00 PM. The eight Netbook computers are in great condition, needing only minor updating and battery charges.

Measures were taken to ensure accessibility for students with a disability, with the support of the Society for Students with a Disability (SSD), so that accessible polling stations were clearly marked and advertised on Voting Day.

Out of the 3069 students who voted, 121 students used our polling stations with the highest traffic polling stations located at the McPherson Library, Clearihue, and the SUB. With such little engagement at polling stations it is suggested that fewer polling stations be set up and pollsters focus on more promotions.

2. Pollsitters

Eight pollsitters were hired to operate the polling stations and assist in additional promotional events for the Elections Office. While the majority had not worked previously with the UVSS Elections, only one orientation session was needed to train individuals.

While the core responsibility of the pollsitter is to manage the polling station while making voters aware of use of WebVote on Voting Day, the Elections Office also employed pollsitters as promotional assistants on Voting Day. Promotional tasks included: hand-billing, chalking in classrooms, handing out supplements, and talking with students about ways to access the WebVote system.

The Elections Office suggests that an allocation of the budget should be used to promote the Election Office by organizing similar promotional events.

3. Informal Dispute Resolution

The EPM provides for Informal Dispute Resolution. This process has helped to elevate the workload that formal complaints create. The Elections office received one issue from students online during voting day.

1. As previously mentioned, online polls for the 2015 Fall Referendum opened at 9:00am PST as per schedule. Included in the ballot, the WebVote system highlighted that a 2/3 vote was required to pass. This information was incorrect. The UVSS Constitution and Bylaws (found on our website uvssselections.com/policy) clearly states Bylaw 3. 1. "Membership fees may be altered by a majority vote of a referendum." As per Bylaw 4.7.d "Quorum for a referendum shall be fifteen percent [15%] of the voting

membership.” Therefore, of fifteen percent of the student body, 50.01% of voters must vote in favour of a referendum for it to pass.

Once the mistake on the WebVote ballot was brought to the attention of the Elections Office, the University’s administration was contacted to make the change. The ballot was changed to the correct requirement of majority vote as per Bylaw 3.1.

Following the Elections Office making the change in correspondence with the University Secretary, students on online platforms (Facebook, YikYak) quickly began to make complain that this was unfair and believed that the change was done in order to rig the election.

The Elections Office quickly responded with a statement (Appendix A), summarizing what occurred, apologizing for the mistake while ensuring the student body knew “The UVSS Elections Office is an independent office within the University of Victoria Students’ Society (UVSS), set to facilitate and offer unbiased and impartial information regarding elections and referenda concerning students. All student elections within the UVSS are organized and supervised by the UVSS Elections Office.” This statement was posted on the Elections Office website and linked from our social media platforms.

The University Secretary has also created a statement that is awaiting University Communications approval.

This informal dispute was resolved quickly, to the satisfaction of the individuals who brought forwards these issues. The mistake was a human error and the Elections Office is encouraged to be more cautious in reviewing the ballot to avoid misinformation in the future.

BUDGET

The cost of running an election can be significant, and many factors external to the Elections Office can impact the budget. These factors include: the number of referenda asked; the number of candidates running; the conduct of the candidates in terms of the time and effort needed to resolve complaints; appeals from any complaints decisions; and the ease of hiring and training both pollsitters and electoral officers.

Staff hours comprise the largest part of the budget. Election policy and processes require substantial staff hours in attending to details, without which the integrity of the election could be compromised. The CEO was given sufficient autonomy in operations; however, she requested that budget management and oversight be reserved to the UVSS General Manager. Budget details may be obtained from the UVSS General Manager. That being said, the Elections office remained within budget that was given to them by the UVSS General Manager.

CONCLUSION

The 2015 UVSS Referenda were conducted fairly and democratically. All of the administrative and organizational responsibilities set out in the EPM were met, and carried out in accordance with the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect for all individuals involved in the process.

Online voting continues to be an ideal platform for the elections, with no issues surrounding security, voter eligibility, or accessibility.

Appendix

A. Elections Statement on Misinformation on the Ballot

As per UVSS Election Policy, the Elections Office has the responsibility and authority to conduct elections under the Electoral Policy Manual, independently from the Board of Directors and the Electoral Committee, and impartially among candidates and slates.

Our Electoral Policy is based on the principles of:

- 1 respect for the democratic process and persons involved in that process,
- 2 the right of voters and candidates to participate in a fair and just election, and
- 3 fair and open processes for resolving election issues, including adjudications.

With these principles in mind, we would like to emphasize the third principle and be transparent and open with the student body, the voters. This morning, polls for the 2015 Fall Referendum opened at 9:00am PST as per schedule. Included in this morning's ballot, the WebVote system highlighted that a 2/3 vote was required to pass. This information was incorrect. The UVSS Constitution and Bylaws (found on our website uvsselections.com/policy) clearly states Bylaw 3. 1. "Membership fees may be altered by a majority vote of a referendum." As per Bylaw 4.7.d "Quorum for a referendum shall be fifteen percent [15%] of the voting membership." Therefore, of fifteen percent of the student body, 50.01% of voters must vote in favour of a referendum for it to pass.

Once the mistake on the WebVote ballot was brought to the attention of the Elections Office, the University's administration was contacted to make the change. The ballot was changed to the correct requirement of majority vote as per Bylaw 3.1. We apologize that this oversight was not caught earlier.

The UVSS Elections Office is an independent office within the University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS), set to facilitate and offer unbiased and impartial information regarding elections and referenda concerning students. All student elections within the UVSS are organized and supervised by the UVSS Elections Office.

Sincerely,
UVSS Elections
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