

UVSS Electoral Report

Fall 2020 Referenda and By-Election

Introduction:

The University of Victoria's Student Society Elections Office, as dictated by the Electoral Policy Manual, submits this 2020 UVSS Electoral Report. The UVSS Elections Office is comprised of three electoral officers:

Chief Electoral Officer: Emma Hamill

Senior Electoral Officers: Ali Calladine and Owen Pachal

The Elections Office would like to thank the UVSS Board of Directors, the Electoral Committee, and all UVSS Staff, especially Graphics, Sarina deHavelyn, Katie McFarlan, Stefanie Hardman, and Alannah James. Thank you to CFUV and the Martlet for supporting the needs of students by publicizing elections information and events. The Office also acknowledges the University Secretary's Office for their assistance and for the administration of the WebVote System.

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

Summary of Referendum and By-Election:

1. Questions:

In addition to a Director at Large By-Election, for Fall 2020, the UVSS Board of Directors approved the following questions for a Fall referendum:

Referendum Question 1: Are you in favour of establishing a fee of \$1.50 per full-time student per semester and \$0.75 per part-time student per semester in order to fund the creation of open-source textbooks and other open-source learning materials, which would be used in UVic classrooms?

Referendum Question 2: Are you in favour of ending the collection of the fee, which is \$3.00 for full time students per semester and \$1.50 for part time students per semester, that goes towards a Public Interest Research Group (PIRG)?

Referendum Question 3: Are you in favour of reallocating the fees currently held in trust for the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), to be split evenly between a student bursary/award and the UVSS Operating Fund? You are voting for this question under the following circumstances: - The fees held in trust are \$128,848.17 as of August 10, 2020; and - If this question is defeated, the UVSS Board of Directors will administer all PIRG fees currently held in trust in the best interests of students at the University of Victoria until such time as a service provider is identified to fulfill the purpose of a PIRG, or the collection of the PIRG fee is ended.

2. Major Changes:

The UVSS Elections Office was opened on August 1, 2020 to prepare for an online Election. The EPM was updated and approved on September 21, 2020 and provided the framework for all procedures and standards.

3. Nominations:

A call for nominations was held October 5-16, 2020 with two (2) nominations for DAL and one (1) board endorsed proponents for each question. One proponent and two DAL candidates needed to supply more information to complete their nominations.

Fulfilling all obligations for nomination, Jonathan Granirer was the official proponent for question 1, Evan Guildford was the official proponent for questions 2 and 3, and Mariel Hernandez was acclaimed DAL as the other nomination was incomplete and did not respond to complete the nomination.

4. Online Campaigning

As stipulated in the UVSS Electoral Policy 3.3.b.ii, a campaign period was held beginning 9:00am on Monday October 26th and closed at 12:00pm on Friday November 6th of the following week with. Throughout the campaign the candidates acted with the utmost diligence and respect for the Electoral Policy and process.

The Elections Office, CFUV and the Martlet held an All Candidates Forum via zoom on October 30th that gave each candidate the opportunity to present their platforms, and answer questions posed by the hosts and questions asked over social media by UVSS members.

5. Voting

Online voting began at 9:00am on the second Wednesday of the Campaign Period (November 4, 2020) and closed at 12:00pm on the second Friday (November 6, 2020) of the Campaign Period.

The Office of the University Secretary (USEC) reported no voting irregularities or issues arising during the voting period. USEC provided the WebVote data to the Elections Office within 75 minutes of polling being closed.

6. Results

The official ballot report of the 2020 Fall UVSS Referendum was as follows:

Number of Eligible Voters	Number of Voters	Voter Turnout
19,062	1,116	5.9%

Referendum Question 1: Are you in favour of establishing a fee of \$1.50 per full-time student per semester and \$0.75 per part-time student per semester in order to fund the creation of open-source textbooks and other open-source learning materials, which would be used in UVic classrooms?

Yes	No	Result
891	214	QUORUM NOT MET (PER UVSS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS 4.7.C)

[Number of Spoiled/Blank Ballots: 11]

Referendum Question 2: Are you in favour of ending the collection of the fee, which is \$3.00 for full time students per semester and \$1.50 for part time students per semester, that goes towards a Public Interest Research Group (PIRG)?

Yes	No	Result
903	196	QUORUM NOT MET (PER UVSS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS 4.7.C)

[Number of Spoiled/Blank Ballots: 17]

Referendum Question 3: Are you in favour of reallocating the fees currently held in trust for the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), to be split evenly between a student bursary/award and the UVSS Operating Fund?

You are voting for this question under the following circumstances:

- The fees held in trust are \$128,848.17 as of August 10, 2020; and,
- If this question is defeated, the UVSS Board of Directors will administer all PIRG fees currently held in trust in the best interests of students at the University of Victoria until such time as a service provider is identified to fulfill the purpose of a PIRG, or the collection of the PIRG fee is ended.

Yes	No	Result
902	191	QUORUM NOT MET (PER UVSS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS 4.7.C)

[Number of Spoiled/Blank Ballots: 23]

Director at Large:

Candidate	Number of Votes Received	Result
Mariel Hernández	N/A	ACCLAIMED (PER UVSS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS 6.8.E)

The official results were posted on the Elections Office website as required by the Electoral policy at 9:00am on November 9th, 2020.

No significant issues or formal complaints were raised during the nomination or campaign period. All Electoral Policy communications and notification deadlines were met.

The Elections Office was able to verify by November 6th at 4pm that all candidates had fully complied with all responsibilities required.

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, 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 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.

The Registrars office worked diligently to confirm candidates eligibility electronically.

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:

Nomination Period	Monday October 5, 2020 (9:00am PST) – Wednesday October 16, 2020 (9:00am PST)
Campaign Period	Monday October 26, 2020 (9:00am PST) – Friday November 6, 2020 (12:00pm PST)
Voter Information Guide Launch	Monday October 26, 2020
Candidates Forum	Friday October 30, 2020 (2:00pm PST)
Voting Opens	Wednesday November 4, 2020 (9:00am PST)
Voting Closes	Friday November 6, 2020 (12:00pm 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.

CAMPAIGNING

1. All-Candidates Orientation

The Elections Office hosted an All-Candidates Orientation via Zoom, 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 SEOs. Copies of the Candidates Handbook and How to Campaign Guide were distributed electronically.

3. Voter Guide

Instead of the traditional elections supplement, which the Elections Office compiles for publication in The Martlet, we took this as an opportunity to post electronically on our website. Various social media was used to promote the guide. This format continues to be an extremely useful communication tool. Two half page ads in the Martlet were used to promote the electronic guide. Additionally, website ads with the Martlet CFUV and UVSS were put forward.

4. All-Candidates Forum

The All Candidates Forum was held on October 30, 2020 at 2:00 pm PST via Zoom with CFUV and the Martlet. Audience turnout was mainly made up of candidates and their supporters. CFUV and the Martlet moderated the forum, giving candidates time to present their platforms. The moderators prepared questions and held a Q and A session. With few candidates the forum lasted a total of approximately 30minutes. The Forum was recorded and shared across social media as an informational tool for all candidates.

5. Advertising

The Elections Office took advantage of the traditional methods of advertising emails sent to every eligible voter through the University Secretary's office, CFUV ads, the Martlet, 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. The US Election took place on November 3rd and lead to Facebook restricting the boosting of any ads with language around voting, elections, ballots, referendums etc. This prevented additional boosted ads for the UVSS election. With limited boosting, social media engagement covered the bare necessities. We recommend that a clear role within the UVSS be designated to take responsibility for the promotion of the election, or that an additional communications officer be hired to focus on online engagement and that the processes of running a fair and efficient election, and that of promoting student engagement with the UVSS and election continue to be help separate.

7. Online Content

Candidates continued to use websites and Facebook as a platform for campaigning. However, this election candidates did not use these platforms to their full capacity. Of the three candidates only one spent money online advertising, only a quarter of their allowed budget. Since the budget is reimbursed, we recommend a minimum spending amount, this could increase reach and overall candidate and member engagement.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The greatest issue raised was holding an online electoral event during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the results indicate, voter turnout was very low and although most voters voted in favour of the questions, quorum was not met. The Electoral Committee and UVSS Senior staff provided the office with a strong mandate, support, resources, and their time. With their support, the Elections Office had a detailed

communications plan and marketing strategy, but with the few candidates and online fatigue of membership, this marketing was not enough. Voter participation was only 5.9%, the number required for quorum was 2860. Additionally, with the US Election, social media ads were highly scrutinized and rejected for political content.

The proponents participated in forums and interviews organized by the Elections Office, Martlet and CFUV. They had very little online presence and only one candidate spent money on the campaign (approximately \$50). With the DAL acclaimed they also did little campaigning. Unlike previous elections, the word was not getting out from candidates.

During this referendum, the UVSS Elections Office internally faced time constraints, marketing limitations. However, the Office was able to meet these challenges and ensure that deadlines and electoral events were administered impartially and fairly while supporting candidates and proponents/opponents as set out by the Electoral Policy.

With the likelihood of online elections for the foreseeable future, I suggest that in addition to the Electoral Officers, the UVSS hire a Communications Officer for the office to ensure the time and expertise required to have a successful online presence and increase voter turnout.

Mechanisms to collect formal feedback on the referendum process and on the Elections Office itself has been collected from the UVSS members who engaged with us online, candidates, and forum participants. This feedback as well as notes and observations from myself and the Senior Electoral Officers, will be used to form the basis of policy, procedural and administrative recommendations for the Electoral Committee.