

CSU General Election 2020

Electoral Officers Final Report

The 2020 CSU general election was a unique electoral process with clear outcomes and a number of concerns that should be addressed. The CSU is now well versed in conducting the elections using internet voting, which was extremely fortunate given the Covid19 pandemic that cancelled classes during election week in an effort to reduce the number of people on campus. As well, this was the first election the CSU held using the Single Transferable Vote method of voting and counting. Turnout for the election was relatively low, with a total of 764 voters (9.3%). This should not be a major surprised as the previous online general elections included referenda questions that likely had a large draw for turnout. As well, the lack of activity on campus surely had an effect as well. A number of the positions were contested with a good number of candidates; however, three candidates were disqualified during the campaign period for a variety of reasons. The following pages provide a general overview of the electoral process and include some recommendations moving forward, many of which remain from previous election cycles.

It was again a pleasure and honour to work with the CSU and all of its staff and members. Should you have any questions regarding the following commentary, please don't hesitate to contact me at anytime for further discussion.

A total of 764 students voted, made up of 298 Arts and Science students, 285 Business and Professional Studies students, 54 Education, Health and Human Development Students, 81 Fine and Applied Arts Students and 46 Global and Community Studies students. The total membership is 8,219, making turnout 9.3%. One trend that is notable is the participation of international students outpacing domestic students (54% vs. 46% respectively). This has been the case in the past few elections.

Rules and procedures

The rules and procedures governing the CSU elections are generally conducive to the conduct of fair elections. As usual the CSU has done a good job of updating the bylaws and procedures with incremental changes to adapt to new issues, though further improvements should always be considered and some are included below.

Though not a serious issue in this particular election, I continue to be concerned with the nomination and elections of collective liaisons. Few rules currently exist regarding how collective positions may be filled or voted on. Only the position for International Student Representative is restricted in terms of nominations and voting given it is a position that is easily segmented by the registrar's office.

Historically, the other collective positions were not respected by a significant proportion of voters as they voted for positions they surely didn't self-identify with. I would suggest making the self-identifying positions two-part ballots questions, with the first question asking the voter to state they self-identify with the particular group the representative is standing for. If the voter affirms, they identify with that group, only then would the actual vote for that representative be counted. The current process simply allows for too much leniency and trust in a process many members are not respecting or understanding.

Some housecleaning of the rules and procedures should be carried out. It would be helpful to combine articles 4 & 9 regarding complaints and violations. As well, the table of contents on the Procedures Manual does not match the majority of the sections in the manual. An update on this is required. Furthermore, a rule should be established clarifying what is published regarding complaints. The current regulations surrounding complaints and investigations into violations dissuade participants from making complaints as they fear being attached to the public complaint process. As such, very few official complaints are made. A number of individuals wanted to submit complaints, but in the end withdrew the complaint or did not submit one when they learned the complaint would be shared with the respondent (including the name of the complainant). There are obviously pro's and con's both ways on this issue.

The rules also require the CRO to review the vast majority of campaign material prior to the candidates posting said material. While this likely ensures candidates are meeting the rules of the campaign to a greater degree than otherwise, I also feel this is overly paternalistic for a university setting. The candidates should be provided the rules of the process and if the rules aren't met, they should be sanctioned accordingly.

Nominations

Previous efforts to amend the nominations package in order to simplify the process have paid off and the number of mistakes made on the packages have been reduced dramatically.

The nominations process ran reasonably smoothly. Each of the candidates on the ballot fulfilled their nomination requirements. The pre-check deadline was used again and was an effective way of getting candidates to submit nomination packages early to ensure their packages met the required criteria to be nominated allowing time for any corrections. Several packages were submitted prior to the pre-check deadline, so it did have added value.

One nomination package was denied as the member submitted a package with just 25 signatures and a number of the members that signed for that candidate were not CSU members. The potential candidate noted that they collected the signatures at the new Lonsdale Campus where the majority of students are not CSU members. There is no clear way for potential candidates to identify which students are CSU members and which are not. The nomination package has been updated to clearly state that nominators must be CSU member (and that continuing education and executive education students are not CSU members).

As well, eligibility requirements for the CBPS candidates should be amended as they sound more like vacancy criteria rather than enforceable election eligibility criteria. Eg. "Preference is given to candidates who have served as a member of the CBPS presidents' committee."

As noted in the past, if the nomination process could be altered to be completed by students entirely online, it would greatly reduce difficulty in reading and "interpreting" written packages. While this is not a priority, it could be added to a wish list.

The optional "Candidate Statement" submission deadline is a few days after the nomination package deadline which I believe increases the number of candidates who submit the statements. The statements are a primary reference tool that members may use to distinguish the candidates when voting. Nevertheless, there were a number of candidates that did not submit statements, and several that attempted to submit them after the deadline.

Candidate Orientation Meeting

The Candidate Orientation meeting is an excellent opportunity for candidates to meet the CRO and learn about the important process they are embarking on. It is also helpful for the CRO to meet the candidates. However, as noted previously, it is extremely difficult for all candidates to be available for one such meeting. The current rules state that candidates cannot begin their campaign until they complete such a meeting with the CRO. Rather than require subsequent in person meetings, I organized several phone meetings for candidates unable to meet with me at the initial Candidate Orientation meeting. In the future, I intend to offer three alternative times and if a candidate cannot meet at one of those times, they should not be allowed to campaign in the process as running an infinite number of orientation meetings is frustrating and if someone is a serious candidate they should be able to meet at one of the 4 times (offered at different times of day and evening).

To encourage students to make an effort to attend the actual Candidate Orientation meeting, some incentives should be noted, including the fact that their campaign cannot begin until this meeting is complete. One issue that clearly arose is that a number of candidates did not understand the rules of the electoral process, even though they participated in the candidate orientation where some of those rules were summarized and the candidates were told to ensure they understood all rules by reading the CSU bylaws and procedures with regard to the elections.

Advertising

A good amount of advertising was provided regarding this electoral process and certainly election days were further highlighted by the effective campaign of candidates. Certainly, a massive driver of turnout for internet voting are the bulk emails that are sent out via Simply Voting providing information on how to cast a ballot.

All Candidates Forum

The all candidates' forums were a great opportunity for candidates to speak to members, but also for members to learn about the candidates. This year, greater participation was seen at the forums. This is not usually the case and further efforts to advertise this opportunity may be effective in drawing more people to such events. Again, the Capilano Courier carried out the process, which has been a positive development.

Polling

The polling process was held over 3 days, starting at 9 am on March 17th and ending at 5 pm on March 19th. Given the concerns with Covid19, the decision was taken to cancel the information booths that would normally be set up at both the main and Sunshine Coast campuses. This is an element that needs to be considered for next election as the procedures require a booth on all campuses and there is now a campus in Lonsdale. If the regulations remain the same, another information booth will be required at that campus as well.

Ideally, the internet voting vendor would allow for members to cast ballots as many times as they wanted, with each subsequent ballot cast cancelling their previous ballot. This would go to some lengths in addressing concerns with candidates or other students putting pressure on individual members to vote for them while hovering over their computer.

Ballot

The ballot was created on the Simply Voting template for ballot production and suited our purposes nicely. One element of the STV voting process that was likely not clear to candidates or voters was the method in which tie votes would be handled. Indeed, there was one tie vote in the first round between 2 candidates and the number of 2nd preferences that went to the other candidate is how the tie is broken. This method should be discussed by the governance committee as it has both pro's and con's, including incentives for strategic voting.

Complaints and Appeals

A number of issues were raised during this round of elections, including 3 disqualifications and one formal complaint. Nevertheless, in many cases, members are unwilling to make a public complaint given fears about how the individual they are complaining about may respond. Through the process, I received over 100 emails regarding complaints, including many emails from supporters of some of the candidates that were disqualified, seeking to have me reinstate the candidates.

As mentioned, unfortunately, I had to disqualify 3 candidates during this election process. I have no desire to remove candidates and would far prefer to keep all candidates in the process if possible. However, I also must work to retain faith in the process and the trust of the electorate in the actual process, bearing in mind that these elections are conducted as per the BC Societies Act.

In all 3 cases I believe that the candidates were simply not aware of basic rules regarding the election, despite the candidates taking part in the candidate orientation process and being told that they should read the sections of the CSU bylaws and procedures that pertain to the elections. In some cases, these candidates believed that they should have been provided warnings prior to being disqualified, however, during an election process, if serious enough rules are being broken, there simply isn't the leeway to provide for warnings.

The one complaint that was filed during this election process targeted an issue that should be clarified in the rules and procedures. A candidate that lost the elections filed a complaint after the results were posted about a candidate that used the Capilano University logo on their campaign poster. I approved the candidate's poster 10 days prior to the results being announced (with a caveat that the university may not accept the candidate using their logo). The CSU rules do not explicitly state that the university logo should not be used. Perhaps such a rule should be made part of the procedures.

A number of issues arose regarding social media posts from people or unnamed handles that posted on behalf of candidates or posted about candidates. This is an area that is nearly impossible to regulate currently, especially with no rules in this regard and a number of candidates or others involved in the elections raised concern with how this affected the process. Consideration could be made to set expectations for such posts (eg. Instagram post Capilano_Confession posting various candidate posters and tagging them in various ways or others seemingly campaigning for candidates prior to the official campaign period. In neither case is it easy to attribute any action to a specific candidate. As well, a large volume of campaigning is posted in Punjabi that I simply don't have the resources to monitor.

As noted previously, I believe we are likely to see greater concerns with regard to members voting under pressure from candidate or campaigns. Internet voting removes control of the voting process

from the election administration and as such far less oversight is available to ensure voting is taking place according to the rules and procedures. This is a tricky subject as it is easy to exert pressure on the membership without others knowing and there are many avenues to “vote buy” given the lack of control from the administration. Another concern that was raised more than in previous rounds is slating, with many perceiving that slating was taking place during these elections (even outside the one case where two candidates were disqualified, partly on this basis) and that this would be a more prominent issue in the future if efforts were not taken to alter rules.

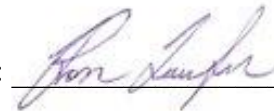
Of course, evidence of these cases could turn up or complaints could be made to the CRO for action to be taken, but a reasonable level of evidence is required to intervene in such situations.

In a separate matter, I believe it remains valuable to create a simple complaint form to simplify the election complaints process. The form could be available online and/or at the CSU service desk, outlining any required information would make the complaints process more official and easier for complainants. This would also provide an outline of necessary details for the CRO and appeals committee to handle complaints and appeals more efficiently and could make clear that a complaint is public and is sent to the respondent as well.

Finally, a number of candidates failed to submit candidate expense forms prior to the required deadline. As is normal in such cases, I made a recommendation for the board to sanction these new board members with a small fine. On this note, I would consider implementing a simple penalty in the procedures that would impose a daily fine deducted off future board salaries on late submissions and a final deadline where a candidate would not be able to take office if the statement is not submitted by this time. This would further incentivise candidates to submit on time and allow for the timely submission of the final election report so the new board can be official appointed sooner.

Ron Laufer
Chief Returning Officer
Capilano Students' Union

Signature: _____



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