

CSU General Election 2022

Election Administrator Final Report

The 2022 CSU general election was a difficult election, marred by serious allegations, complaints and disqualifications that in at least one case undermined fundamental voting rights. While serious incidents did occur, this did not undermine the entire election and certain candidates were disqualified. I am aware that many people on all sides of these equations are likely dissatisfied with these elections and I can only hope that elections in the future are free of the kind of incidents that occurred this year.

The 2022 general election voting process was conducted online, but given that most restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic have been removed, many of the online procedures put in place during the initial phase of the pandemic were removed, notably the nomination process. I believe that we have retained much of the positives from when we initially moved things online, but have reverted to paper where it made sense.

Turnout was reasonably high, with a total of 937 voters (12.3%), while the 2020 general election saw 9.3%. Some key positions were contested with a good number of candidates. As noted however, there were several official complaints made during this election process, which is something we haven't seen in some time. The following pages provide a general overview of the electoral process and include some recommendations moving forward.

While it is always a pleasure to work with the CSU staff and members, this was a trying election process that I would like to avoid in the future. Should you have any questions regarding the following commentary, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time for further discussion.

A total of 937 students voted, made up of 280 Arts and Science students, 360 Business and Professional Studies students, 70 Education, Health and Human Development Students, 132 Fine and Applied Arts Students and 95 Global and Community Studies students. The total membership is 7,604, making turnout 12.3%.

Rules and procedures

The rules and procedures governing the CSU elections are generally conducive to the conduct of fair elections. The CSU has done a particularly good job of updating the bylaws and procedures with incremental changes to adapt to new issues this year.

A recent rule change that I recommended was the abolishment of the requirement for the Elections Administrator to review campaign material prior to the candidates posting said material. This put greater responsibility onto the candidates and no longer treats them in the paternalistic manner that had been in place in the past. However, for this election, several candidates were caught posting materials that included the use of unauthorized CSU or Capilano University logos on them. In this election, this was problematic, both because it's just contrary to the rules, but also because I don't see the unauthorized use of such logos as a serious offence worthy of disqualification. Given this, I initially provide candidates a warning when caught breaking this rule. However, often complaints

about most infractions, including this, only surface near or at the end of the campaign which leaves me with little tangible recourse on such an infraction. This leaves me with a situation where I'm taking drastic action against some proven complaints made after results are announced and doing essentially nothing for others.

I also note that the campaign allegedly included a little bit of involvement of an outside group that has been seen to be involved in other student government elections. This will not be the last of this kind of group being involved and if there are concerns with such involvement, then consideration must be made with regard to how to handle it.

On this note, one suggestion that has been made is to consider altering the procedures slightly to only release unofficial results from the election after the 48-hour complaint period has passed. This could possibly remove incentive for candidates to file complaints based on seeing the results of the election.

Nominations

The nominations portion of this election process reverted back to the paper submission of nomination forms. This made things significantly easier than when we tried to process nominations using various forms of online systems. One issue that remains is that we don't have full clarity on what kind of signature is acceptable. Given we were still in the pandemic situation, I have accepted signatures that were made digitally (though not simple typed names). Nevertheless, the ability to authenticate such signatures is low, though I note authenticating written signatures is difficult if required as well.

For this election, there were 32 candidates standing for the various positions, which is quite a reasonable number in comparison to previous elections. Each of the candidates on the ballot fulfilled their nomination requirements. The early nomination package review 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 early nomination package review deadline, so it did have added value.

The further use of online forms for the submission of the Candidate Statement and Expense Report were extremely helpful to reduce burden on administering the election. We used an online complaint form which was useful, but should be updated in the future to include information on complaint deadlines vs. just providing information as well as anonymous complaints and the limitations that come with doing so.

Candidate Orientation Meeting

The Candidate Orientation meeting is an excellent opportunity for candidates to meet the Elections Administrator and learn about the important process they are embarking on. Again, likely given the online nature of the meeting, the vast majority of candidates were able to attend the initial meeting. This made my job in this regard much more pleasant as I only had to create one more meeting to accommodate a few candidates that could not attend that first meeting. In the future, I think I'm going to need to add more visuals in an attempt to clarify what is allowed and what isn't allowed during a campaign.

Advertising

A good amount of advertising was provided regarding this electoral process and certainly election days were further highlighted by the 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. I am aware that some targeted advertising of the election process was sent out to specific groups that are sometimes less likely to be aware of the elections. It's clear however that a number of candidates were advertising/campaigning by walking around with posters that included QR codes that took voters straight to the voting page. While this is seemingly positive, it also very much puts the candidate at risk of violating CSU procedures that restrict candidates from being in the vicinity of members when they are voting.

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. For this election, good participation was seen at the forums. This is not always 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.

Membership

For the past number of years there has been some difficulty determining which members at ká lax-ay campus were CSU members and questions loomed about whether the registrar's office had them tagged correctly or not. This has been slightly exacerbated by the pandemic and many courses moving online. As such they are not necessarily courses tagged as ká lax-ay.

The CSU should investigate and determine how to best include members affiliated with the ká lax-ay campus so that they are properly included in CSU elections, both as candidates and/or voters. As elections administrator I saw a little bit of flexibility in how to read the procedures and given our pandemic situation stretched the wording a little to extend the vote to all those registered in a ká lax-ay program, rather than just those with at least one course tagged as ká lax-ay. Consideration should be made to include all ká lax-ay affiliated individuals. I would recommend avoiding any rule that would allow for self-identification if possible.

Polling

The polling process was held over 3 days, starting at 9 am on March 15th and ending at 5 pm on March 17th. Given the reduction in concerns with Covid19, we set up information booths on both campuses in order to provide greater visibility for the election and a place for members to both ask questions about the election or even vote if they wanted to do so on our laptop.

Last year the regulations were amended to allow for members to cast ballots as many times as they wanted, with each subsequent ballot cast cancelling their previous ballot. This is a very good security feature that reduces incentive to pressure individual members to vote for them while hovering over their computer or phone, given that voter can simply cast another vote in private later. However, a few issues need to be addressed on this point.

1. This is only useful if members are aware they can do this. We should be actively advertising this feature in the future.
2. This feature, coupled with the fact that members are sent personal direct links to their ballots can lead to members sharing links to their personal ballot.
 - a. This unintended consequence is problematic and must be resolved.

In the past, some candidates shared their personal ballot link which had the effect of their own ballot being overwritten a number of times. As well, members that were sent that personal ballot link were not voting in their own name and were having their ballots overwritten as well.

This is something that needs to be addressed, but there is no perfect solution. One solution is to remove personal voting links altogether, which slightly reduce ease of access to the ballot, but would also remove any concerns about ballots being over written. All members would need to login to cast their ballot. An information campaign could be made to provide voter education that one can vote as many times as they want and only the last vote cast counts. Another solution could be to only allow for access to voting via personal links. This would remove the ability for candidates to campaign with QR codes and would reduce the ease with which candidates can solicit votes in the immediate as members would have to search through their email to find the access to voting.

Ballot

The ballot was created on the Simply Voting template for ballot production and suited our purposes nicely. This is the third time the CSU used the STV voting process, though only one position had enough candidates vying for it to use the STV system this year.

Clearly STV is a confusing counting process and unless a candidate really drills down into the data, they simply have to trust that the counting is being done correctly. We had some very close votes, including one race where the votes had to be recalculated based on one candidate being disqualified. If a case like this occurs in the future, we should save the raw data for members to view before updating the data after any disqualification, just to provide even better transparency.

Complaints and Appeals

This round of elections included numerous complaints and appeals. It is incredibly taxing handling these complaints and investigating them and then the appeals. Obviously, this is an integral part of the process, but I do believe it would be best if the Elections Administrator had a means of delegating the complaints portion of the process and was separated from the appeals portion of the process in its entirety.

There were 6 decisions taken during this election. Some of these decisions included multiple candidates. As well, 4 appeals were made and decided upon. This is a very difficult element of the process to administer, requiring a lot of time to investigate and write up decisions. These investigations and decisions will never be up to the standard of everyone's liking, as at the end of the day, I do not have the resources to investigate matters to the same degree as government level elections.

Regarding the actual complaints and appeals, I will direct you to the actual complaints, appeals and decisions posted on the CSU website for my opinion on each of those matters.

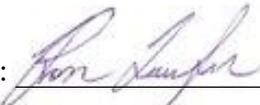
Expense Statements

For this election, expense statements were filed online and any documentation that was needed to be filed was emailed to me. For this element of the process, both myself and the CSU need these filings as I must ensure statements and expenses regulations were adhered to and the CSU must reimburse candidates for any eligible expenses filed. The CSU and I will work toward a more integrated system of filing these for the future.

One thing to be aware of with regard to expense statements is the fact that most candidates are not going to expense sunk costs into subscription services for software or other services that they may use for the elections. In theory these should be noted on their expenses, but where is the reasonable line drawn. We surely shouldn't worry about MS Word or Photoshop, but should we for specific poster design programs or other more clearly election related subscriptions? This is a difficult element to manage.

While most elected candidates submitted their expense statements on time, four submitted their statements late and others failed at submitting their receipts in a timely manner.

Ron Laufer
Elections Administrator
Capilano Students' Union

Signature: 

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