CSU By-Election 2021

Election Administrator Final Report

The 2021 CSU by-election was another unique electoral process with clear outcomes and a very few concerns overall. It is almost no longer worth nothing how fortunate the CSU is for having a well rooted internet-based voting system at this time and that the bylaws and procedures were amendable to online voting some time ago. The 2021 by-election was conducted during the continued COVID 19 pandemic and while campus is open, many restrictions remain in place. Many procedures were put in place last year to address the exchange of the numerous forms involved in these elections online, including how candidates collect nominations electronically and how I as an administrator could verify these nominations. But with the reduction in restrictions, the elections process is less restricted than it was last year as well, with some elements of the process back to allowing for in person processes, including nominations if a candidate wished to do so and campaigning. Nevertheless, a number of online processes remain in place and will likely remain into the future as they are simply more efficient from the candidate stand point as well as the administration side.

Turnout remains comparably low when reflected against elections held prior to the pandemic. For this by-election a total of 566 voters (7.4%) took part, while the 2019 by-election, which was pre-pandemic saw 11.5%. Certainly, this by-election had no major elements attached to it, like any referendum questions, that tend to drive voter participation up. Only one key position was contested in this election, though a good number of positions were filled via the process. Unfortunately, a number of vacant positions remain. There were no official complaints made during this election process. The following pages provide a general overview of the electoral process and include some recommendations moving forward.

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 566 students voted, made up of 163 Arts and Science students, 201 Business and Professional Studies students, 66 Education, Health and Human Development Students, 90 Fine and Applied Arts Students and 46 Global and Community Studies students. The total membership is 7,598, making turnout 7.4%.

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 recently with incremental changes to adapt to new issues as always. I do note that some of the features of the previous set of rules providing greater guidance to the elections administrator regarding violations have been removed.

Nominations

Having completed a few elections with an entirely online nominations process, for this election, given campus is open, we opened nominations to be conducted using paper again. We however still allowed for members to sign these forms with electronic signatures. The only issue that we had for this nomination process was that a few candidates submitted typed names as signatures, which I would not accept as signatures. In these cases, I returned the packages to the candidate to resubmit with electronic or handwritten signatures.

Unfortunately, one member that sought to be nominated could not attain 10 supporting signatures. The member noted that they were sick and wanted to attain the rest of the signatures later, however I did not allow them to do so as the nominations period was open for quite some time.

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.

The further use of online forms for the submission of the Candidate Statement and Expense Report were extremely helpful to reduce burden on administrating the election. While a complaints form was also made and available online, it was again not used in this particular election cycle. These forms were made using either Google Forms or JotForm and both had benefits and weaknesses that should be explored further.

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. Again, likely given the pandemic, 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.

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. It is also clear that the majority of voters cast ballots shortly after an email blast is sent out via Simply 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, participation was not high. It is not so easy to drive traffic to such an event and the main set of people that will draw people to these events are the candidates themselves. 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 October 5th and ending at 5 pm on October 7th.

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, 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.

While this is a positive security feature, the downside of the possibility of sharing personal links is significant and should be considered whether to continue using this feature or not. There were no concerns regarding this feature this election, however, last election there were a few candidates that shared their personal links causing a substantial amount of communication and resolutions last election.

The options moving forward are to discontinue this feature or continue the use of the personal links providing the clear wording in the emails that these links should not be shared. Or, personal links could be removed from the emails, but this would require members to login to vote.

Ballot

The ballot was created on the Simply Voting template for ballot production and suited our purposes nicely. This is the fourth time the CSU used the STV voting process, though again, only one position had enough candidates vying for it to use the STV system this year, though the winning candidate received more than fifty percent of the vote and STV distribution was not required.
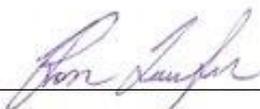
Complaints and Appeals

This is the third consecutive election that didn't include any official complaints or appeals being filed. It is a real pleasure administering elections with low levels of complaints! As noted previously, a simple online complaint form is available on the CSU website to simplify the election complaints process and provide greater clarity to anyone complaining what the process requires. The form was made available online and, in the future, a hard copy could be made available at CSU service desks as well.

Expense Statements

This is the second election we've run that allows for candidates to be reimbursed for any campaign expenses up to the $100 limit. It seems candidates are not using the opportunity to create materials for their campaigns as candidates did not file for expenses. Unfortunately, a number of elected candidates submitted their expense statements after the deadline for submissions. I created a

decision on this basis referring the issue to the CSU board. None of these candidates had any expenses to file for, they simply forgot or did not understand the process.

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Ron Laufer
Elections Administrator
Capilano Students' Union

Signature: _____

Date: October 20, 2021