

CSU General Election 2021

Election Administrator Final Report

The 2021 CSU general election was another unique electoral process with clear outcomes and a very few concerns overall. Again, we find ourselves thankful that the CSU is well rooted in internet-based voting at this time and that the bylaws and procedures were amendable to online voting some time ago. The 2021 general election was entirely conducted during the COVID 19 closures and as such the entire process, including the campaign was conducted online. 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. As such, we were able to refine these procedures this year and make them that much more efficient.

Turnout was considerably lower than in 2020, with a total of 467 voters (5.7%), while the 2020 general election saw 9.3%. Campus closures and lack of any major referendum questions surely lowers interest in such an election. Some key positions were contested with a good number of candidates. 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 467 students voted, made up of 112 Arts and Science students, 212 Business and Professional Studies students, 56 Education, Health and Human Development Students, 50 Fine and Applied Arts Students and 21 Global and Community Studies students. The total membership is 8,170, making turnout 5.7%.

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.

The rules no longer require the CRO to review campaign material prior to the candidates posting said material. This puts greater responsibility onto the candidates and no longer treats them in the overly paternalistic manner that had been in place in the past. No candidates needed to be sanctioned for problematic materials.

Nominations

The nominations portion of this election process was likely the largest change that members felt. A regulation change now only requires potential candidates attain 10 support signatures rather than the previous 25. As well, we moved away from having the CapU IT department assist in providing

online registration. The process did not work well in 2020 and as such we moved entirely to forms built within JotForm and Google Forms. This provided the election administration far greater control over the process, though it did require the election administration to manually process requests for nomination forms. Potential candidates may have had some misgivings about having to wait a few hours for custom crafted nomination forms that then allowed the candidates to keep track of how many support signatures they received and was fully completed with all their correct information. These were key issues that were problematic in 2020. The processing of these nomination forms is considerably easier using the online system, though authenticating whom the support signature is from is arguably weaker than paper forms.

An initial deadline for nominations was set for March 2, 2021, but only 13 candidates vying for 11 positions were approved based on that deadline. Given this, the CSU board voted to extend the nomination deadline to March 8, 2021. This resulted in 22 candidates standing for 16 positions.

Unfortunately, there were a few members that sought to be nominated for various positions but could not attain 10 supporting signatures. It is unclear what the barrier was for these members as most of them didn't collect more than one or two signatures.

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. The rule change allowing Candidate Statements to be up to 500 characters is appreciated as JotForm limits using character limits rather than word count.

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. 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.

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, greater 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.

Polling

The polling process was held over 3 days, starting at 9 am on March 16th and ending at 5 pm on March 18th. Given concerns with Covid19, no information booths that would normally be set up at both the main and Sunshine Coast campuses were provided for.

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.

In this election, a few 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. The issue was raised on the morning on March 18th, allowing for plenty of time for me to contact those that sent out such links to inform them to both advise those that they sent the links to and ensure that they cast a last ballot to overwrite all the others.

We can either continue the use of the personal links, but provide very clear wording in the emails that these links should not be shared or personal links should be removed from the emails. The latter 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 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.

Complaints and Appeals

This is the second 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

While a number of regulations have been updated, one key note is that the candidate campaign expense limit moved from \$75 to \$100. More than that however, any expenses incurred are fully reimbursable via the CSU.

For this election, only one candidate claimed expenses, though it is unclear how the processing of reimbursements went as they had not taken place by the time of writing of this report.

All elected candidates submitted their expense statements on time.

Ron Laufer
Elections Administrator
Capilano Students' Union

Signature:  _____

Date: March 24, 2021