



Report of the Election Department regarding the 2018 General Election for the Student Association of George Brown College which was held March 19-27, 2018

Prepared By Charles Wilson, CRO & Clara Pasieka, DRO

Retrospective Report:

The Return to a Culture of Engagement

Introduction to the Retrospective Report from the Chief Returning Officer

This portion of the report contains the Election Department's recommendations on how to build further on the electoral system in order to ensure greater accountability, fairness and engagement in and with the election cycle.

This could likely be my last election with the Student Association and I am grateful for my time here. I first want to thank my team. We are very lucky to have joining us for her second term as Deputy Returning Officer, Clara Pasioka, who has written these recommendations with me and joining us for the first time as Deputy Returning Officer, Jennifer Bennett. Clara and Jennifer provided invaluable operational support to me during the course of the election.

I am as always grateful for the direction and wise counsel of the Elections Committee. We owe Faris and Tiffany a large debt for the hours of work they put into this election cycle. I am thankful for the support of the SA staff and Board during this process.

During my last two reports, I focused on a number of by-law and structural changes which would allow us to create a better electoral system. While the electoral system we have is not perfect, only minor changes will be recommended by the department in this report.

In this election cycle, a new discipline process was created. While I am glad it was not tested during this election cycle, it is my belief that the use of standard forms for discipline created a fair system and one easier to administer.

I wish to highlight the lack of competitive races in this elections cycle. While acclaimed races are easy to administer, they are not healthy for the organization or the elections cycle. Allow me to be blunt, all board members should and must encourage anyone interested in running in the election, regardless of if they are running in that race or not. I have seen candidates joke towards elections staff, "Don't tell them to run for my race"; this is not appropriate for the race, or healthy for the organization. Competitive races breed choice, and that is never a bad thing.

This election, candidates who were acclaimed faced a yes/no ratification vote. From the Election Department's observation, this seemed to keep more candidates engaged during the campaign. Students had a chance to learn more about different constituency groups at events than they would have, had these candidates not been present. I believe this is beneficial for the Student Association on the whole.

This election cycle an email was sent to every department encouraging students to become involved in this election. An email was also sent to the head of every existing club encouraging

already engaged students to take the next step and run. I am grateful for the college and clubs in assisting to facilitate participation, and it is my hope that this will continue for future events.

Further, an agreement was reached with the college regarding the Board of Governors' election. We have a specific recommendation regarding this election in this retrospective report.

Finally, I would like to speak about the complexities of our elections. It may come as a surprise to some, that our elections are complex to organize and few elements are simple. In the course of 14 weeks we hire over 25 part time staff, train them, schedule them, and then leave them for hours to run a polling station, often with limited supervision. We have 18 different types of ballots. We use a software program that is complex, and is coded in a different way than the list from the Registrar's Office. We run five different get-to-know-the-candidates events, each one requiring hours of preparation. We deal with the college on everything to confirming voting status, to the booking of polling stations, to ensuring posters are removed and do not damage the walls, to issues of harassment or other serious violations. Finally, we do this all with a three person team. It is a pleasure for me to do this, and on behalf of the election team, I thank you for the opportunity.

This cycle we collected quantitative and qualitative data from surveys of poll clerks and candidates. We have incorporated these findings into the recommendations.

I leave the Board our department's recommendations for it to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest with gratitude for my time here and humility in my accomplishments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Charles Wilson
Chief Returning Officer

Recommendation #1 Election timelines

Fall election

Posting for CRO/DRO opens	August 6, 2018
Posting for CRO closes	August 15, 2018
Interviews for CRO	August 17, 2018
CRO starts	August 20, 2018
Posting for DRO closes	August 20, 2018
Interviews for DRO	August 22, 2018
DRO starts p/t	August 24, 2018
Nominations open	September 28, 2018
Nominations close	October 9, 2018
All candidates meeting	October 10, 2018
Extended nominations open	October 10, 2018
Campaigning starts	October 11, 2018
Extended nominations close	October 12, 2018
Online voting begins	October 17, 2018
In person voting begins	October 22, 2018
Voting ends	October 25, 2018
Count Day	October 26, 2018

General Election

Posting for CRO/DRO opens	January 2, 2019
Posting for CRO closes	January 14, 2019
Interviews for CRO	January 21, 2019
CRO starts	January 24, 2019
Posting for DRO closes	January 21, 2019
Interviews for DRO	January 25, 2019
DRO starts p/t	January 30, 2019
Nominations open	February 25, 2019
Nominations close	March 6, 2019
All candidates meeting	March 7, 2019
Extended nominations open	March 7, 2019
Extended nominations close	March 8, 2019
Campaigning starts	March 11, 2019
Online voting begins	March 27, 2019
In person voting begins	April 1, 2019
Voting ends	April 4, 2019
Count Day	April 5, 2019

Recommendation #2 Method of Voting

It is recommended that the Board set the method of voting for the fall 2018 and the spring 2019 elections as follows: eight days of online voting and three days of in person voting for the fall election and four days of in person voting and eight days of online for the spring election. While some have argued “Everything is online these days”, the data we collected emphasizes the value of in person polls indisputably. Poll clerks reported extremely positive responses including, feeling more connected to the SA and to other students, as well as, feeling closer to reaching their career goals as a result, which given the mandate of this SA, are significant enough outcomes to recommend continuing this practice. Further, many voters at the in-person polls inferred they would not have thought of voting if they had not been encouraged by elections officials to understand what this was all about through an unthreatening, inviting atmosphere created at the polls. The polls create the opportunity for election officials to meet students where they are at rather than needing students to make the first step. For this reason, we feel many students who participated this election cycle would never have taken the step to vote had it only been online. It is also noteworthy that this was the first full election here that used a combined voting method and the voting turnout was the highest we have seen in the recently recorded years at the Student Association. A surface look at some other organizations who switched only to online voting did not necessarily return an increase in voter participation, debunking a rationale often used by advocates of switching everything to online. Given this, we recommend the continuation of in person polls, in addition to online polls.

Recommendation #3 SA Engagement and Awareness

There is a remarkable lack of awareness of the role of the Student Association and why the Student Association exists. It is our recommendation that in the months of September and January awareness of the role of the SA and the role of the Board be promoted as part of an SA awareness campaign. The encouragement of students to run when the time comes should also occur here. The Elections Department can also help in the reverse case. It is recommended that all polls are given a one-pager from the SA with upcoming deadlines for health benefits etc and general information so polls can serve a multi-purpose, but campaign information must be limited to non-partisan matters.

Further, it is recommended that a one page handout be drafted and presented to all clubs, in particular, launched at the All Club Meetings held at the beginning of the school year, and be available at all events talking about the Student Association in a simple and easy to understand fashion. This will include the role of the Board, and why the Student Association elections are important including, how to run and when. If deemed effective, a similar practice should occur with the Academic Advocacy, the Community Action Centre, Safewalk and other groups.

Finally, in order to foster a culture of engagement in the membership, it is recommended that general meetings incorporate some programming either before or after the AGM which focuses

on professional development (such as a resume building workshop) or during an already existing engagement event (such as clubs and volunteer fair). This might also have the benefit of increasing attendance at AGMs, which has been a problem in the past. Further, it is recommended that prior to the AGM each campus director hosts an open forum on each campus to talk about the various needs of the campuses and foster a culture of engagement within the campuses leading up to the AGM. In short, the Board should be providing opportunities to listen to the membership, and bring interested people into the SA governance structure ahead of the AGM and in build up to the election.

Recommendation #4 Slates

A debate needs to occur regarding if slates benefit the electoral process or not. Two options for the Board to consider are: (a) the status quo; or (b) the elimination of slates.

For option b, section 13.4 would need to be amended by adding the following:

No nominee for a director shall be nominated as part of a slate, and no slate name shall be formed or appear on the ballot. Cross endorsement and cross campaigning shall be allowed, but each platform shall be unique and no expenses shall be shared.

Recommendation #5 The Board of Governors' Election

The Board of Governors' election is run by the Student Association on behalf of George Brown College. In this light it is recommended that by-law 13.3 (f) be repealed and replaced as follows:

The Student Association shall run the elections for the Board of Governors' Position, should the college invite the Student Association to do so. The costs of the election in regards to reimbursement of candidates' expenses shall be subject to reimbursement by the college. The rules for this position shall be determined by the Chief Returning Officer in consultation with the college.

And that any other references to the Board of Governors' Election be deleted (13.4(e))

Recommendation #6 Election Spending Limits

In response to rules around acclaimed candidates and the budget implications, among other factors, it is recommended that election spending limit for acclaimed positions be set at \$100.00. It is also recommended that over the course of the next four election cycles the spending limit for executive positions be reduced in increments until it is \$200.00.

Recommendation #7 Demerit Points

It is recommended that 20 demerit points be the level of disqualification for all candidates. This would be done by repealing and replacing the last paragraph of by-law 13.10 with:

When a candidate is assigned more than 20 demerit points, that candidate shall be disqualified.

Recommendation #8 Changes to the Nominations Process

There have been two issues regarding the nominations process related to signatures which have become problematic and have been voiced to us formally and informally as a barrier for potential candidates.

Some candidates from under-represented groups have voiced that signatures should be from their constituents as opposed to others deciding who from their communities is worthy of representing these groups.

While signatures do serve a real purpose in regards to showing a basic level of support for a candidate, we believe that the threshold is too high. For example, the current amount of signatures is higher than the signatures required to run for the Mayor of Toronto, an office with significantly greater responsibilities and impact.

Further, since there has been no limit to the number of signatures a candidate can get and candidates were actually encouraged to get more in case some were not valid, this actually created an opportunity for pre-campaigning by reaching out to significantly more members than required for nominations, which is not the point.

We recommend that the signature threshold for all positions be lowered and that signatures for constituency representatives reflect the community of interests which they serve. Three options for consideration are:

Option 1

For all positions except constituency representatives a threshold of 25 signatures is sufficient, and for constituency representatives five signatures from people who self-identify from that constituency group is sufficient.

Option 2

For all positions a threshold of ten signatures be established.

Option 3

Each candidate needs to have two nominators, a first and second nominator, which is a practice many other organizations use.

Recommendation #9 Board training

In order to further ensure that all board members understand the roles of their office and values of the SA, it is recommended that by-law 5.1(g) be added and it reads as follows:

Should a candidate who has been elected not attend all training sessions organized for the new Board members and be absent from the first Board Meeting after the Board

has been duly composed then the candidate shall be deemed to be never elected to the office. The board chair may excuse a candidate from removal under this section should extraordinary circumstances warrant it.

Recommendation #10 By-Law Change Re: Staff and Executive Members

It is recommended that by-law 1 be amended to add the following sections:

- 1.4 Members of the Executive, the General Manager, full time staff members, and part time staff members while on official duty, may not engage in partisan activity and shall remain impartial and non-partisan regarding the Student Association election or a member's meeting.
- 1.5 Section 1.4 does not preclude members of the executive or part time staff members from running in the Student Association election or voting in a member's meeting, as long as the provisions of the elections by-law are satisfied.
- 1.6 The General Manager shall remind all persons effected under section 1.4 of their professional obligation prior to the opening of nominations.

Recommendation #11 Changes to Leave of Absence Provision and Restriction on Actions of Sitting Board

The current rules surrounding the leave of absence provisions provides a need for clarity. First, it may be punitive the amount of time which board, staff or committee members are deprived of their income during the whole elections period. We believe this disproportionately negatively effects students who depend on income from a job with the SA to support themselves, especially those for whom working on campus is their only option under their visa. Second, the current section makes it unclear if board members can attend board meetings during this time. Finally, there is no restrictions which prevent the majority of the Board who are seeking re-election as a slate to pass a number of organizational reforms designed to "bribe" the electorate.

It is recommended: (i) that the leave of absence provision only take effect beginning on the day which voting opens until voting closes; (ii) the Board's power be limited during the election period; (iii) restrictions be added to ensure ethical conduct of the Board before the leave of absence takes effect.

It is recommended that provisions of by-law 13.8 regarding the leave of absence read as follows:

- c. Any members of the Board, staff, or committee members shall take a leave of absence during voting days.
- d. The Student Association Board and executive shall not undertake any of the following after the day designated as the start of nominations until the end of the elections period:
 - i) the appointment or removal of any board member, officers or managers;
 - ii) any changes to the by-law or policies regarding the election or the elections process or the term of the new board;
 - iii) the creation of any new program or services; and
 - iv) directions to officers or managers of the corporation regarding new programs or services of the Student Association.
- e. For the greater certainty, subsection (d) does not prohibit the Board from:
 - i) acting in case of emergencies; or
 - ii) completing work already begun before the opening of the nominations period.
- f. The Board may delegate by resolution a committee which is capable of performing the functions under subsection d, as long as the committee is composed of at least five people, two of whom must be members of the executive and all of who must be board members not seeking re-election.
- g. The Board may not meet from the first day of campaigning until the day which voting ends in the election. This section does not apply in case of emergencies.
- h. Any board member may not undertake or organize an event on behalf of the Student Association or from the budget of the student association from the start of nominations until the close of voting.
- i. Any member of the Board, staff, volunteer or committee member who is running in the election may not discuss the election while on duty from the start of the nominations period.
- j. Student Association space or resources cannot be used for campaigning purposes, including meetings to plan the campaign or meetings during the campaign.