

# SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA) 2017 Executive Council Election

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Chief Returning Officer 2017

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## Executive Summary

This report highlights the outcomes, recommendations and concerns with regards to SAITSA's 2017 Executive Council election processes as well as the candidates meetings, panel discussion, management of campaigns and campaign period, voting, campaign expenses, poster tear down, and results. As a student-lead and managed entity, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Students' Association (SAITSA) recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for positions on the Executive Council (EC). The report makes recommendations from the Chief Returning Officer and Political Committee, however it does not constitute any endorsement of SAITSA.

New this year, SAITSA hosted a series of workshops in February, which included 'What is SAITSA?', "Life as an EC", "Campaigning 101" to encourage student participation in the election. On February 15, 2017 nominations formally opened for students seeking a position on the Executive Council. Each candidate was required to obtain fifty signatures from students that were in good academic standing with SAIT, and good standing with SAITSA. To qualify as a candidate, a completed nomination was to be submitted by March 8 or March 22 at 4:00pm. By the final deadline, 10 candidates had submitted a completed nomination package.

The campaign period saw no disqualifications during this election. Once again, a demerit system was instituted. This would entail such demerits as 1 point being a basic penalty for improper poster placement, while a 10 is the highest penalty resulting from significant infractions such as damage to SAIT and/or SAITSA property (see Appendix A for possible infractions). This campaign was respectful, and saw only minor demerits. In fact, the vast majority of infractions were poster related.

Voting opened on March 29 at 8:00am. Emails with voting details were sent to all eligible student voters and voting commenced. On Friday March 30 the voting came to a close at 4:00pm with 1,736 voters (13.5%) of eligible student voters (12,767) having cast a vote.

The SAITSA 2017 Executive Council election was open and fair, with excellent accountability of all candidates, student participation, and had acceptable good governance practices. It is recommended that there be a regular review of the SAIT Students' Association Policies and Procedures to ensure that this improved level of accountability is assured year to year.

## Candidates Elected

The SAITSA political committee would like to congratulate all of the participants, supporters and voters of the 2017/2018 Executive Council election. The following candidates were the successful in their campaigns:

**President:** Alex Dimopoulos

**Vice President Student Life:** Connor Goodfellow

**Vice President External:** Rachel Moerschfelder

**Vice President Academic:** Alysson Torres-Gillett

## Overview

SAITSA recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for the Executive Council (EC) positions. SAITSA holds two sets of elections every academic year. This election represents the second election, and elects the Executive Council members. This report will provide an overview of the Political Committee activities, nomination periods, the candidates meetings, candidate panel night, campaign periods, voting, and results. Recommendations for future elections are also provided throughout this report.

## Political Committee

The Political Committee is comprised of four members: Chief Returning Officer (CRO), Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), Student at Large (SAL), and the SAITSA Governance and Advocacy Manager as an ex-officio, non-voting member. The Political Committee was comprised of the following:

Jennifer Dotchin (CRO)

David Jones (DRO)

Monica Urribarri Medina (SAL)

Rachel Paris (Ex-Officio, Governance and Advocacy Manager)

The members of the Political Committee actively worked to ensure that SAITSA Policy and Procedures were upheld throughout the election. Each individual contributed their knowledge and expert judgment when discussing candidate questions. All candidates were provided electronic access to the Political Committee, as it was decided in previous elections that the Committee would only accept questions or concerns via email. The CRO or Governance and Advocacy Manager provided written responses within a maximum of two business days.

### *Issues and Recommendations:*

- Undertake previous report recommendations to update the Policy and Procedures:
  - Clarity where posters can and cannot be placed; use of social media; how to make a complaint of breach of SAITSA Policies and Procedures; clarity around conflict of interest declarations, and liaise with departments of SAIT prior to the commencement of elections.

## Nomination Periods

Nominations refer to the act of candidates being formally entered into the election. In order to be nominated for SAITSA's fall EC election, candidates must receive 50 signatures from students who are in good academic standing and in good standing with SAITSA. Candidates who themselves do not meet these criteria will not be accepted into the election. There were two nomination periods for this election. Students who waited until the second nomination period were still able to campaign but had less time to do so. Therefore, there is an incentive for students to submit their package within the first nomination period to gain the extra time for campaigning.

The first nomination period for the EC election ran from February 15 to March 8, 2017. The total number of nominated candidates for the nomination period was 6. The second nomination period ran from

March 8 - March 22, 2017. The total number of nominated candidates for the second nomination period was an additional 4. There were a total of 10 candidates for the Executive Council election: 2 for President, 3 for VP External, 3 for VP Academic and 2 for VP Student Life.

## Candidates' Meetings

Candidates' Meetings were held at the end of each nomination period (March 8 and March 22). These meetings are mandatory for all candidates to attend. Candidates were introduced to the Political Committee, reviewed the Political Committee's responsibilities, reviewed and read the SAIT Students' Association Policies and Procedures and Code of Conduct and Ethics.

They were then given information on the photo and video session, and given ample time to ask questions to the committee. Also at this time, the candidates were given a document to sign accepting the code of conduct and ethics, and acknowledgment of the SAITSA Policy and Procedures (See Appendix B for the Candidates' Meeting agenda). The video and photography shoots were held the following day of each of the Candidates Meetings. In order to accommodate a candidate from the Art Smith Aero Centre, SAITSA organized a trip up to the satellite campus to take the candidate's photo and video.

## Campaign Period

All candidates must first attend a Candidates' Meeting to be eligible to begin campaigning. Candidates running for the Executive Council are permitted a maximum budget of four hundred dollars. SAITSA reimburses 50% of each candidate's legitimate campaign expenses (up to a maximum of \$200). This maximum represents both in-kind contributions to campaigns and those with receipts to ensure that campaigns are fair and accessible to all students. Like many years prior, posters placement was the most predominant challenge.

This year a demerit system was once again used: 1 point being a basic penalty for infractions such as improper poster placement, while 10 points was for the highest infraction, for example damage to SAIT and/or SAITSA property (for a list of possible infractions see Appendix A).

In total, 4 candidates obtained a demerit point of some description. The highest demerit total obtained was -8, which the Political Committee reviewed the candidate for removal, and due to the basic penalties incurred, it was decided further action was not warranted. All penalties were distributed to candidates by email.

- One candidate was docked -5 points for campaigning in a SAITSA establishment
- Four candidates were docked up to -3 points for improper poster placement
- Four candidates made formal complaints about posters being removed throughout the election.

Complaints and challenges:

- One SAIT custodial staff member inadvertently removed posters, and the matter was rectified internally.
- There was three complaints made by the public of inappropriate posters. While their design or execution of the poster(s) was not initially noted as inappropriate by the Political Committee, the Candidate was asked and complied with, the posters removal.

- SAIT asked SAITSA to remove a Candidate's poster/banner which posed a security concern as it was blocking a security camera.

*Issues and recommendations:*

- Ensure that the Policies and Procedures are updated to include posters not allowed to be blocking security cameras.
- SAITSA should continue to notify custodial staff when undertaking an election period to ensure that all staff are aware of where posters are allowed and not.

## Candidate Panel Night

Candidates were required to attend and participate in the Executive Council Candidate Panel Night. Each candidate answered a series of questions that they were provided ahead of time, as well as questions from the Weal newspaper reporter. The debate drew an estimated 50 in-house attendees and over 700 livestreamed on Facebook. It was initially envisioned as a debate and panel discussion.

*Issues and Recommendations:*

- Like all democracies, connection to media is important to ensure a fair and transparent election. The Weal should be engaged with early on to discuss their inclusion and support of the electoral process.
- The feedback from the candidate panel night was generally positive, and is perceived as a valuable addition to the process. The addition of the Weal was considered valuable, however it was also recommended to take questions from online as well as in house. We therefore endorse Panel Nights continued inclusion and refinement.
- Continue to move to a web-based platform (Livestream – Facebook, etc.) for greater audience.

## Voting

Students received an email at their SAIT student email with voting information once the voting period opened. The SAITSA EC 2017 election used online voting through an independent third party company, Votenet. Voting opened on March 29 at 8:00am and closed on March 30, 2017 at 4:00pm. Voters were not required to vote for all positions and questions pertaining to data collection were optional.

*Issues and Recommendations:*

- There was a complaint by a voter that specific candidates were not placed on the ballot for selection. A review was undertaken using Votenet software that determined that the voter did not complete the ballot process therefore the complaint was based on user error rather than issues with the program or ballot set-up.
- As required, SAITSA requests their voter list from SAIT; the voter list is comprised of all SAITSA fee-paying members. Once received by SAITSA, the voter list is then uploaded into Votenet a required minimum two-weeks prior to the opening of polls. For this election, SAITSA set up two polling stations during voting days to help facilitate the voting process; on the first day of voting a dozen students were identified as SAITSA fee paying members, but had not received the voting email. SAITSA's Governance and Advocacy Manager contacted the Office of the Registrar in an attempt to identify the issue with the voter list. At the writing of this report, a report from SAIT staff looking into the issue with the voter list had not been received by SAITSA for inclusion into this report. However, early investigations indicated that approximately two-hundred students were not included on the voter-list who should have been. Students who were identified as fee-

paying members, but who had not received the voting email, were permitted to come into the office to complete a paper ballot. It is recommended that SAITSA's Executive Council bring forth this issue to an appropriate SAIT body to ensure SAITSA has regular and accurate access to a full membership list.

## Expenses and Poster Tear Down

All candidates were able to submit their campaign expenses by 4:00pm on March 30, 2017. All expenses submitted were clear and concise and were within the approved limit and were approved. Poster tear down was a success, and all candidates worked together to clear main and satellite campuses of poster materials.

## Results

The total number of eligible voting students: 12,767

See Appendix C: Votenet Results for more information

Votes Cast: 1,736

Voter Turnout: 13.5% Vote breakdown by candidate.

### President Candidates

President	Votes	Percentage
Alex Dimopoulos	870	52%
Felipe Soto	812	48%

### Vice President External Candidates

Vice President External	Votes	Percentage
Daniel Caine	354	22
Deborah Mebude	501	31
Rachel Moerschfelder	785	48

### Vice President Academic Candidates

Vice President Academic	Votes	Percentage
Anisa Abbas	485	30
Alysson Torres-Gillett	848	52
Sharon Wong	304	19

### Vice President Student Life Candidates

Vice President Student Life	Votes	Percentage
Connor Goodfellow	1047	64
Wayne Lin	597	36

## Appendix A: SAITSA Elections Penalty Guidelines

### SAITSA's Election Demerit System

The following infractions are based on SAITSA's Elections Policies and Procedures and SAITSA's Elections Standards. Penalties associated with the infractions are based on the severity, long-term consequences and overall impact on the process of holding fair and open elections.

<b>Infractions and resulting demerit points:</b>	
10	Damage to SAIT and/or SAITSA property (walls, doors, etc.) through the use of prohibited materials (spray paint, etc.) for campaign purposes
8	Tampering with another candidate's campaign material
8	Failure to submit campaign expense form and receipts by deadline
8	Slandorous behaviour towards another candidate
8	Offensive/illegal/inappropriate material on posters
5	Campaigning prior to attending the Candidates' Meeting
5	Use of tape (other than green or blue painter's tape) to post campaign materials
5	Campaigning in any of the prohibited SAITSA or SAIT operations/offices etc.
5	Failure to attend poster tear-down
5	Failure to attend the SAITSA organized speeches/debates (Executive Council elections)
2	Failure to submit campaign outline to the Political Committee
2	Failure to update committee of major changes to campaign outline
1	Making a frivolous complaint about another candidate (1 point per complaint)
1	Poster placement that does not comply with Elections Policies & Procedures (1 point per poster up to a maximum of 8 points)

## Appendix B: Candidates' Meeting Agenda

### SAITSA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Candidates' Meeting Agenda

March 8<sup>th</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 – 5pm

Room V128 - Campus Centre building



<u>Item</u>	<u>Responsible</u>
<b>1. Welcome &amp; Round Table Introductions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Returning Officer (CRO) – Jennifer Dotchin</li> <li>• Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) – David Jones</li> <li>• Student at Large (SAL) – Monica Urribarri Medina</li> <li>• Resource – Manager, Governance &amp; Advocacy – Rachel Paris</li> <li>• Candidates &amp; campaign team (if applicable)</li> </ul>	CRO & All
<b>2. Political Committee responsibilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review complaints, ensure rules are being followed, make candidates accountable, approve expense forms, declare results, monitor panel night, etc.</li> </ul>	CRO
<b>3. How to submit questions and/or concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Send to <a href="mailto:saitsa.elections@edu.sait.ca">saitsa.elections@edu.sait.ca</a></li> <li>- Make sure you reply to <a href="mailto:saitsa.elections@edu.sait.ca">saitsa.elections@edu.sait.ca</a> and <b>NOT</b> <a href="mailto:saitsa.cro@hotmail.com">saitsa.cro@hotmail.com</a> etc.</li> <li>- Any communications from the PC to all candidates will go to your SAIT student email</li> </ul>	CRO
<b>4. Policies &amp; Procedures Overview - reading &amp; signing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read through all the P&amp;P's &amp; sign off</li> </ul>	CRO & DRO
<b>5. Important Dates &amp; Events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile Due               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> Nom Period: March 9<sup>th</sup> – 12 pm</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> Nom Period: March 23<sup>rd</sup> – 12 pm</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Photo &amp; Video session               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> Nom Period: March 9th - TBD</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> Nom Period: March 23<sup>rd</sup> - TBD</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Panel Night – March 28<sup>th</sup>, 6-9pm - The Odyssey</li> </ul>	MGA

- Candidates to arrive at 5:45pm
- Voting – March 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup>
  - Who is eligible to vote, voting process, etc.
  - Voting link goes to SAIT email
- Poster Tear Down – March 30<sup>th</sup>, 4pm – V204 SAL
- Results Event Night – March 30<sup>th</sup>, 5pm - The Gateway DRO
  - Bring your friends, family, anyone who wants to celebrate your efforts!
  - There will be free games and Bingo with great prizes!
- 6. Profile Submission & Campaign Plan CRO
- 7. Campaign Photo & Video Session MGA
- 8. Training for incoming Executive Council MGA
  - Successful candidates start on May 1<sup>st</sup> full time, there is a two-week transition period and your term officially starts on May 15<sup>th</sup>.
- 9. Code of Conduct - reading & signing CRO & SAL
- 10. Photo & Video session sign up MGA
- 11. Open Question Period ALL

## Appendix C: Votenet Results\*

President			
Total Voters:12767			
Choice	View Raw Votes	Votes	Percentage
Alex Dimopoulos		866	52%
Felipe Soto		811	48%

  

Vice President External			
Total Voters:12767			
Choice	View Raw Votes	Votes	Percentage
Daniel Caine		354	22%
Deborah Mebude		501	31%
Rachel Moerschfelder		785	48%

  

Vice President Academic			
Total Voters:12767			
Choice	View Raw Votes	Votes	Percentage
Anisa Abbas		485	30%
Alysson Torres-Gillett		848	52%
Sharon Wong		304	19%

  

Vice President Student Life			
Total Voters:12767			
Choice	View Raw Votes	Votes	Percentage
Connor Goodfellow		1047	64%
Wayne Lin		597	36%

\* Results from Votenet are different to total votes for President Position only. This is due to the addition of 5 paper ballots that were cast due to challenges with SAIT email list. The results of the President position were within a 2% vote difference. Therefore the committee hand counted (three members) to ensure that these would not affect the outcome or percentage, which they did not.