

SAIT Students' Association
(SAITSA)
2016 Executive Council Election
CRO Report

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2016 SAITSA EC Elections

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Executive Summary

As a student lead and managed entity, the SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA) recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for positions on the Executive Council (EC). The campaign was respectful, professional, and had very few SAITSA Policy and Procedure infractions.

On February 8, 2016 nominations opened for students seeking a position on the EC. 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 February 25, 2016 at 4:00pm, while the second nomination period was March 3. By March 3, 2016, 20 candidates had submitted a completed nomination package and were instructed to attend a Candidates Meeting to discuss the SAITSA Policy and Procedure with the Political Committee. However, one candidate withdrew after submitting their nomination form, bringing the number to 19. **There were a total of 19 candidates for the Executive Council, representing a 170% increase over last year.**

We are delighted to note that during the entire elections process there were no disqualifications that occurred. This year a demerit system was instituted: 1 point being a basic penalty such as improper poster placement, while 10 was the highest penalty resulting from significant infractions such as damage to SAIT and/or SAITSA property (see Appendix A).

Voting opened on Thursday, March 10, 2016 at 8:30am. Emails with voting details were sent to all eligible student voters and the voting began. On Friday March 11, 2016 the voting came to a close at 4:00pm with 2,219 (16.84%) of eligible student voters having cast a vote. This voter turnout represents an increase of 6% from the elections held at this time last year.

This report highlights recommendations and concerns with regards to SAITSA's election processes, conflict of interest within SAITSA, posters, use of social media and campaigning. These issues and recommendations relate to the Candidates Meetings, panel discussion, management of campaigns and campaign period, voting, expenses and poster tear down, and results.

Overall, the SAITSA EC election of 2016 was a great success. The process was both open and fair, with excellent accountability of all candidates, good 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 be completed by December of each year - to ensure future elections will remain relevant and continue to engage the student membership of SAITSA.

Candidates Elected

The SAITSA political committee would like to congratulate all of the participants, supporters and voters of the 2016/2017 Executive Council. The process represented a fair, respectable and open election. The following candidates were the successful in their campaigns:

President

Gar Gar

VP External

Mikayla Schaffer

VP Academic

Alex Dimopoulos

VP Student Life

Connor Goodfellow

Introduction

The SAIT Students' Association (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, held in the winter semester 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)

Selena Narsing (SAL)

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

The members of the 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:

- The committee reviewed and sent an estimated 320 emails during this time period. It was noted that a number of these emails were easily responded to. It is recommended that in the next election a 'Frequently Asked Questions' book be created, and provided to candidates. This would include (but not be limited to): 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.

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 was an incentive for students to submit their package within the first nomination period to gain the extra week of campaigning.

The first nomination period for the EC election ran from February 8, 2016 to February 25, 2016. Reading Week fell from February 15-19th. The total number of nominated candidates for the first nomination period was 17. One candidate however indicated that they wished to withdraw their nomination, bringing the number of candidates in the first nomination period to 16.

The second nomination period ran from February 26, 2016 to March 3, 2016. The total number of nominated candidates for the second nomination period was an additional 4. During this period, another candidate from the first nomination period withdrew their candidacy, bringing the number of candidates to 19. **There were a total of 19 candidates for the Executive Council election, representing a 170% increase over last year.**

There were two students that approached the Political Committee with requests for clarity in the requirements of international students to work for SAITSA. Here we recommend the addition of a question noting eligibility of employment in Canada on the nomination form, as well as a response available online in a Frequently Asked Questions document.

Furthermore, a number of Board members were candidates for this year's election. Clarity around campaigning for election while a Board member is suggested to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure good governance throughout the entire year.

Issues and Recommendations:

- Clarify SAITSA Policies and Procedures and bylaw as to ensure clarity of board membership and campaigning.
- Suspend all Board meetings for a grace period before or after the campaign season, or allow members to step down so as not to create a conflict of interest (perceived, real or otherwise).
- Ensure that there is clarity on the ability of international students to work for SAITSA as a member of the Executive Council. One candidate withdrew their candidacy due to potential challenges regarding their study permit if they were elected.

Candidates Meetings

Candidates Meetings were held at the end of each nomination period. This was a mandatory meeting 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. They were then given a guide on how to plan a campaign, 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 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. Candidates were asked to keep each video to 2 minutes or under. Unfortunately, some of the videos went long, and were later trimmed to ensure fairness.

Issues and Recommendations:

- There were a number of forms to review and complete before the end of the meeting. We recommend that these be provided to the candidates in a package at the start of the meeting. Furthermore, a Frequently Asked Questions document should be created to support candidates understanding of the electoral process.
- Candidates submitted their campaign plan in different formats via email to the Political Committee. It is recommended that a standard template be created to obtain campaign details from each participant.
- We recommend that a policy be drafted to ensure that each video is under two minutes in length, and that candidates acknowledge that they are aware of the limit.

Campaign Period

There were two campaign periods for this election. All candidates must first attend a Candidates Meeting to be eligible to start campaigning. Candidates conducted their own independent campaigns. 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 continued to be a challenge. However this year there were fewer challenges due to clarity in the SAITSA Policy and Procedures. There were no public complaints of improper posters or designs. In fact, it was noted that candidates made a greater effort this year than in past to provide posters to satellite campuses.

This year a demerit system was instituted: 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 (See Appendix A). This was an intuitive and relatively standardized system to issue warnings to students which simplified matters for the Political Committee. This trial

year saw three candidates obtain a penalty. Next year it is recommended to add this to the SAITSA Policy and Procedures.

This year it proved particularly important to clarify the use of social media for campaign purposes. The Political Committee was forced to make a decision, and conveyed it to candidates three days before voting days. In particular, the challenge of the use of hashtags such as #saitsa, #saitsaelection, #saitsaEC, etc. While endorsement of candidates through social media by full-time staff, Board or other SAITSA representatives is a violation of the Policies and Procedures, the use of hashtags is non-proprietary and can be used by any student. It is our opinion that the use of hashtags cannot be considered an endorsement, and only serves to move more information to a broader student body.

The 19 candidates were required to attend and participate in the first ever Executive Council Elections Candidate Panel Night (See Appendix C). There were 5 candidates in each of the four Executive Council seats except for the VP External, which had 4 candidates. Each candidate answered a series of questions that they were provided ahead of time. The debate drew an estimated 60 attendees. It was initially envisioned as a debate and panel discussion, however due to the large number of candidates a broad debate was not possible due to time constraints.

Issues and Recommendations:

- This year a new element in poster media was noted by SAIT Facilities Management— blocking corners by taping paper on its edge instead of ‘flat’ against a wall. After consulting with Facilities Management these posters were moved to above 6’5” by the candidate. This should be added to the Policy and Procedures.
- We recommend that the SAITSA Policy and Procedures for next election be updated to clarify the use of social media for campaign purposes, including the use of #hashtags.
- We further suggest the adoption of the successful ‘Elections Penalty Guidelines’ to SAITSA Policy and Procedures for next election.
- The feedback from the candidate panel night was generally positive, and is perceived as a valuable addition to the process. We therefore endorse its continued inclusion and refinement.

Voting

Students received an email at their SAIT email address with voting information once the voting period opened. The SAITSA EC 2016 election used online voting through an independent third party company, Votenet. Voting opened on March 10, 2016 at 8:30am and closed on March 11, 2016 at 4:00pm without issue.

Issues and Recommendations:

Votenet requires that the voter list be supplied a minimum of two-weeks in advance of the voting days to generate the random passwords. At the time SAITSA collected the eligible

voter list from SAIT, some trades students were not yet registered. When some of these students came to vote, while eligible, they had not received voting emails because they were not registered at the time the voter list was submitted. This issue was managed by providing paper ballots for these students to cast their votes. It is recommended that polling clerks, SAITSA staff and candidates are made aware of this possibility and that those who are eligible are able to vote.

- In previous years, photographs were provided on the online voting system. This year, they were removed to ensure that votes were cast based on merit, not on visual appearances. However, a brochure was available at voting stations that had candidate photographs. It is recommended that next year these brochures continue to be available, however remove the photograph and solely include the biography statement for the same merit based reason.

Expenses and Poster Tear down:

All candidates were able to submit their campaign expenses by the appropriate time March 11, 2016 at 4:00pm. 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 the campus of poster material.

Issues and Recommendations:

- During poster tear down candidates would benefit from having a secure space where they can leave their bags, purses, etc. We suggest SAITSA ensure that there is a room to leave backpacks for poster tear down

Results

The total number of eligible voting students: **13,175**

Votes Cast: 2,219

Voter Turnout: 16.84%

Vote breakdown by candidate

President

Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Michael Benjamin	342	15
Gar Gar	568	26
Alexander Ho	453	20
Denis Ram	347	16
James Vy	509	23

Vice President External

Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Daniel Caine	293	13
Mike Crosby	676	30
Milena Goundar	483	22
Mikayla Schaffer	767	35

Vice President Academic

Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Faith Courtereille	305	14
Alex Dimopoulos	632	28
Justin Samuel	422	19
Claudia Siller	543	24
Kurt Stempfle	317	14

Vice President Student Life

Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Connor Goodfellow	668	30
Nauman Hassan	518	23
Brendan Lambert	131	6
Alysson Torres-Gillett	534	24
Lorie Tran	368	17

Appendix A: SAITSA Elections Penalty Guidelines



SAITSA Elections Penalty Guidelines

Candidates whose conduct is found by the Political Committee to be in violation of SAITSA Elections Policies and Procedures will be issued demerit point(s). A demerit point is a mark made against the candidate's record for a fault or for misconduct.

The guidelines (**on reverse**) is a guideline for both the candidates and the Political Committee; points associated with an infraction may be reduced or increased by the Political Committee should they deem the adjustment necessary. Points for infractions that are not listed will be issued based on the severity of the violation and equated to an infraction that is similar in nature.

Candidates whose total is between 5 and 9 demerit points will be put up for review by the Political Committee and possibly disqualified from the elections. Candidates who receive a total of 10 or more points will be immediately disqualified from the elections.

Concerns about a candidate and/or a candidate's campaign, should be directed to the Political Committee via email at saitsa.elections@gmail.com.

When possible, proof via a 'screen shot' or photo should be provided.

SAITSA Elections Penalty Guidelines

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.

Infractions and resulting demerit points:	
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	Slanderous 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
2	Failure to submit campaign outline to the Political Committee
2	Failure to update committee of changes to campaign outline
1	Making a frivolous complaint about another candidate (1 point per frivolous 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: All Candidate Meeting Agenda

SAITSA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Candidates' Meeting Agenda

February 25, 2016 – 5pm

Room V128; Campus Centre building



<u>Item</u>	<u>Responsible</u>
1. Welcome & Round Table Introductions	CRO & All
a. Chief Returning Officer (CRO) – Jennifer Dotchin	
b. Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) – David Jones	
c. Student at Large (SAL) – Selena Narsing	
d. Ex-Officio – SAITSA Governance and Advocacy Manager – Rachel Paris	
e. Candidates & campaign team (if applicable)	
2. Political Committee responsibilities	CRO
3. How to submit questions and/or concerns	CRO
4. Policies & Procedures Overview - reading & signing	CRO & DRO
5. Important Dates & Events	
a. Photo & Video session – March 4 th MB216	G&A Manager
b. Panel Night – March 8 th , 5-8pm - The Odyssey	CRO
c. Voting – March 10 th & 11 th	G&A Manager
i. Who is eligible to vote, voting process, etc.	
d. Poster Tear Down – March 11 th , 4pm – V204	SAL
e. Results Event Night – March 11 th – The Gateway	DRO
6. Profile Submission & Campaign Plan	
7. Campaign Photo & Video Session	G&A Manager
8. Training for incoming Executive Council	G&A Manager
9. Open Question Period	ALL
10. Code of Conduct - reading & signing	CRO & SAL
11. Photo & Video session sign up	G&A Manager

Appendix C: Candidate Panel Night Agenda

Candidate Panel Night in the Odyssey – March 8th	
Start Time	Item
4:45 pm	Candidates arrive, register, receive name tags, etc.
5:00 pm	Introduce Evening's Event
5:10 pm	<u>1st Panel</u> VP Student Life
5:30 pm	Break
5:35 pm	<u>2nd Panel</u> VP External
5:55 pm	Mix & Mingle: audience, press and candidates mingle
6:15 pm	<u>3rd Panel</u> VP Academic
6:35 pm	Break
6:40 pm	<u>4th Panel</u> President
7:00 pm	Closing statements from organizers, press have chance to interview candidates, etc.