SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA) Board of Directors Election Report October 12, 2016

Written by: Jennifer Dotchin, MA, PMP
Chief Returning Officer

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Executive Summary

The SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA) recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for the positions on the Board of Directors (BOD). This report highlights issues and recommendations with regards to SAITSA's election processes, election promotion, and revisions to current policy and procedure documents. These issues and recommendations relate to the Candidates' Meetings, campaign period, voting, expenses and poster tear down, and results. The recommendations presented are for consideration only, and not intended to replace due process and careful planning.

On September 6th, 2016 nominations opened for students seeking a seat on the BOD. Candidates were required to obtain 50 signatures from students who were SAITSA members. To become a qualified Candidate, a completed nomination package was to be submitted by noon on September 21st for the first nomination period, and by noon on September 28th, 2016 for the second nomination period.

Candidates that submitted a completed nomination package were able to attend a Candidates Meeting at 5:00pm on each nomination day (September 21 and 28). Once a Candidate completed these two steps of submitting a nomination package and attending a Candidate meeting, they were eligible for campaigning. There were six Candidates in attendance at the first Candidates' Meeting and six at the final Candidates' Meeting, bringing the total number of Candidates to twelve. The same proceedings and agenda took place in both meetings.

SAITSA was provided a voter list from SAIT preceding SAIT's Add/Drop deadline of September 16th, 2016. Voting commenced on October 5th at 08:30am. Emails were delayed by approximately 10 minutes due to server issues, but were sent to all eligible student voters. On October 6th the voting came to a close at 4:00pm with 983 of 12535 eligible student voters having cast a vote (7.84%).

Overall, the SAITSA BOD election process was a success. The process was both open and fair, with excellent accountability of all Candidates, and fair student body participation. It was unfortunate that too few students campaigned to join the Board. It is recommended again 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, volunteers, and voters of the 2016/2017 SAITSA Board of Directors. The following Candidates were successful in their campaigns:

- **Jess Beddow**
- **Joshua Bettle**
- **Daniel Caine**
- **Cameron Hodgins**
- **Mitch Holt**
- **Tanya Pittis**
- **Ha Nguyen**
- **Donny Nichols**

Overview

This report will provide an overview of the Political Committee, nomination periods, Candidates' Meetings, campaign period, voting, and results. Issues identified and recommendations will be provided following each section of the report.

The SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA) recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for the positions on the Board of Directors (BOD) and the Executive Council (EC).
The Post-Secondary Learning Act of Alberta states that the business and affairs of SAITSA shall be managed by the BOD, the members of which shall be elected by and from the members of SAITSA.

Similar to the previous Executive Council election, 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.

Overall, due to smaller cohort of Candidates, the election process was fairly free of challenges, which required limited Chief Returning Officer interventions. The Political Committee intervened in a few areas, noted in this report.

Political Committee

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

- ❖ **Jennifer Dotchin** – Chief Returning Officer
- ❖ **David Jones** - Deputy Returning Officer
- ❖ **Melvin Joel Raymond** – Student at Large
- ❖ **Rachel Paris**- Ex-Officio, Governance & Advocacy Manager

The members of the committee discussed Candidate questions, reviewed campaign material and enforced Policies & Procedures pertaining to the election. The committee would only accept questions or concerns in the form of email.

Issues and Recommendations

Fragmented communication system: Once again the political committee was using a fragmented communication system using Hotmail accounts. This election saw progress as a saitsa.elections@edu.sait.ca was created. However, the communication was still fragmented, as it is insecure as well as cumbersome to use both SAIT addresses and Hotmail.

- ▪ It is recommended that the Political Committee be allocated temporary SAITSA emails during the election period.
- ▪ It is recommended that the Student at Large position be reviewed with the next Policies and Procedures update. This should include a more involved role as student ambassador and specific accountabilities.

Nomination Period

In order to be nominated for SAITSA's BOD Election, the student must receive 50 signatures of students whose SAITSA membership fees are paid in full. Students who did not meet the criteria for official nomination were not entered into the election. There were two nomination periods for this election. On September 6th, 2016 nominations opened for students seeking a seat on the BOD. Candidates were required to obtain 50 signatures from students who were SAITSA members. To become a qualified Candidate, a completed nomination package was to be submitted by September 21st at 12:00pm. As per the official Policies and Procedures document, a Candidate is not able to campaign unless (or until) they attend this meeting.

Candidates who submitted a completed nomination package were eligible to attend a Candidates Meeting held at 5:00pm to discuss the policies and procedures with the Political Committee.

There were six Candidates in attendance at the first Candidates' Meeting on September 21st. The secondary nomination period concluded one week following on September 28th at 12:00pm. There were a further six Candidates in attendance, bringing the total number of Candidates to twelve. The second Candidates' Meeting was held on September 28th at 5:00pm. The same proceedings took place as in the first meeting.

Issues and Recommendations

Low BOD Candidate Volume and Student Awareness:
The SAITSA Board represents a full complement of 15, however, there were only 12 students nominated. Leaving 3 spots unfilled on the board, which shifted the election to a yes/no vote.

- It is recommended that the number of signatures be reduced to twenty-five, as in previous years, as it was indicated that the high number of nomination signatures is cumbersome for new students.
- It is recommended to review current promotion mechanisms. This includes further social media advertisements and other media announcements for improved number of Candidates. A full campaign should be launched from the start of the school year and at the end of the winter term, for the BOD specifically; promotion of the upcoming elections in the next school year should be encouraged for returning students.
- Improve SAITSA staff commitment through designated tasks. The Board of Directors recruitment is an important function and further resources could be utilized to promote the elections.

Candidate campaigning before Candidate meeting:
One Candidate began campaigning before attending the Candidates meeting. As per the demerit system, they were awarded -8 points for both campaigning early and number of posters put up.

- It is recommended that information nights be undertaken throughout the school year to ensure that those students interested are knowledgeable about all Policies and Procedures.
- It is recommended that the Executive Council receive regular communication to not interfere with board elections.

Late applications:
One Candidate submitted the nomination form 4 hours late. Due to decreased number of candidates the political committee decided to accept the late nomination package as long as all other components were met (signatures and attendance at Candidate meeting).

Campaign Period

There were two campaign periods for this election. All Candidates were eligible to start campaigning after attending the Candidates Meeting. Each Candidate conducted their own independent campaign with a maximum budget of two hundred dollars. All Candidates were directed to inform the Political Committee of all messages and content being used in their respective election. Due to fewer Candidates, there were fewer challenges in years past.

Issues and Recommendations
Students unable to attend due to class commitments:
Given that SAITSA represents a wide range of students, there were a number of exceptions that were made.

- First, a student with an evening class was unable to attend either Candidates' Meetings. The CRO and Manager of Governance & Advocacy met with the student during the day, however the student was bound by the same time frame as those who would attend the Candidates meeting. And therefore would not have a time advantage.
- One student from a satellite campus ran for the BOD. Since they were not on campus they were excused from the poster tear down on main campus, but were required to undertake poster tear down at their satellite campus.
  - In addition, SAITSA's marketing department and the Manager of Governance and Advocacy travelled to the satellite campus to take the candidates' photo and video; this resulted in a one-day delay in the taking of photo/video compared to main campus candidates.

Policies and Procedures:
The Policies and Procedures document is currently out of date and contains some errors. For instance:

- As highlighted in the Executive Council Election report, 2016 there needs to be appropriate use of social media including the use of hashtags.
- Candidate meetings – defining the function
- How to effectively manage 'Joke Candidates'
- How the Votenet ballot is created, with language considered as well as randomization.
- Exceptions allowed for satellite campus students
- Demerit system to be added

It is recommended that these Policies and Procedures be updated.

Joke Candidates: Any person who campaigns without proper authority is outside the jurisdiction of the Political Committee to monitor. Therefore, when encountering a joke Candidate, the committee is unable to ensure that the student is within the bounds of the Policies and Procedures.

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Voting and Poster Tear Down

The SAITSA BOD Election 2016 continues to use online voting through an independent third-party company, Votenet. To participate in voting, eligible students were sent an email to their SAIT email address with voting information. From here they could find information about the Candidates and place their vote(s). Due to the volume of emails sent, the voting commenced 10 minutes later than scheduled. Online voting provides real-time information, which prevents paper ballot recounts. A reminder email was successfully sent out to those who had not yet voted on October 6th. Six paper ballots were completed due to issues with the Internet and challenges with submission of the digital completed ballot. The Manager of Governance & Advocacy monitored the process, and does not believe this to be widespread.

This election, SAITSA set up voting stations for connection to electronic voting. This year saw surge in students utilizing this service. In fact, 41% of those who voted did so through the polling station this election. A further 21% of voters indicated they had found out about voting through SAITSA Clubs – finding out about the election from Candidates received only 134 votes/mentions.

Issues and Recommendations
Electronic Voting:
In order to improve voter turnout SAITSA has booths set up for connection to electronic voting. Review the cost/benefit of adding more in other sites.
- It is recommended that these booths continue to be utilized in both the Executive Council as well as Board of Directors elections.

Budgets and Results

At 4:00pm on October 6, 2016 the polls closed. Candidates were required to submit their Campaign Expense Forms (Budget) to V204 care of the SAITSA Governance and Advocacy Manager. Candidates must disclose all expenses incurred during their election. Eligible expenses up to $200 are reimbursed up to 50%. Following the elections results the Political Committee met to discuss budgets and poster teardowns.

Issues and Recommendations

Yes/No Vote:
When a yes/no vote occurs, the language on Votenet may be confusing to new voters. Given that responses are either 'yes' or 'no', the confusion lies when you would like to abstain from voting, or only vote for a particular Candidate. Therefore confusion may be 'no – I don't wish to vote for anyone else' due to

perceptions of 'one vote only' or appropriate responses. It would be useful to have further language included in the response for instance.

- o Yes, I approve of this member as a SAITSA board member
- o No, I do not approve of this member as a SAITSA board member
- o Abstain

Poster Teardown:
Five candidates did not attend this event, placing additional burden on the other candidates.

- Make poster tear down a mandatory event, which can face disqualification for next year.

Expense claim: Three candidates did not submit their expense claim by the specified time and forfeited their expenses.

Official Results

Name	Yes votes	No votes	Elected
Neeshay Ali	216	428	No
Jess Beddow	389	279	Yes
Joshua Bettle	385	271	Yes
Daniel Caine	347	299	Yes
Daniel Harrison	237	382	No
Cameron Hodgins	386	266	Yes
Mitch Holt	485	229	Yes
Tanya Pittis	515	204	Yes
Ha Nguyen	346	315	Yes
Donny Nichols	325	316	Yes
Ram Rashed	213	415	No
Gaby Rodriguez Gil	316	331	No