

**2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ELECTION REPORT**
SAIT Students' Association (Saitsa)

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Prepared For: Saitsa Board of Directors

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Executive Summary

The 2020 Board of Directors Election was an election like none other in Saitsa's history. Due to SAIT's restrictions associated with COVID-19, the conventional election process was not viable. Adjustments were required to some election processes to allow for the election to be successfully presented in an online format.

There were a significant number of students who expressed interest in running in this year's election. In the end, only 10 individuals completed the nomination process to qualify as candidates for the 12 Board of Directors positions. As there were fewer candidates than positions available to run for, the vote became a Yes/No ballot vote.

Voter turnout was 6.3% - 788 electors out of a possible 12,531 cast their ballots. This was a significant decrease from past elections but was not unexpected with the current COVID environment we were faced with.

No demerits were issued this year. The Political Committee did however issue 3 warnings for minor campaign issues.

Saitsa is committed to maintaining the highest standards of fairness, equality, transparency and student interest in its elections. This report will highlight the candidate results, election process, issues encountered as well as recommendations to the Board of Directors and more.

All recommendations made within this report have been made in consultation with Saitsa's Manager of Governance and Advocacy, and are based on observations and experiences of the Political Committee. In efforts to continually improve Saitsa's election processes and to establish best practices, the Political Committee encourages the Saitsa Board of Directors to strongly consider all recommendations contained within this report.

Candidates Elected to the 2020 Board of Directors

Congratulations from the Saitsa Political Committee to all the candidates and their supporters of the 2020 Board of Directors Election. The following are the 10 successful candidates in this year's election, as their names appeared on the ballot.

Jide Akinwale

Fatima Bilal

Arek Gellatly

Tim Holowachuk

MacLean Jarvis

Tola Jimoh

Shawna LeBlanc

Krystal Nguyen

Kelly Jeed Sawadan

Dawson Thomas

Overview

This report will provide an overview of the Political Committee, election promotion, nominations, Candidates' Meetings, Meet & Greet, campaign period, demerit issuance, voting, candidate expenses and results. Issues encountered as well as recommendations are included at the end of each section.

Political Committee

The Political Committee is comprised of four members. Members of the Political Committee shall be, the Chief Returning Officer (CRO), the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), the Student at Large (SAL) and the Saitsa Manager of Governance and Advocacy as Ex-Officio (non-voting member).

2020 BOD Political Committee Members:

Ilene Burns – Chief Returning Officer

AnneMarie Darichuk – Deputy Returning Officer

Chinaza Anadozie – Student at Large

Rachel Paris – Manager of Governance and Advocacy, Ex-Officio (non-voting)

Members of the Political Committee, the Governance & Advocacy office, and Saitsa's Marketing and Events departments worked closely to make the necessary changes to this year's election process. In a very short time frame election forms were modified or created, election guidelines were adjusted, and online submission platforms were created to adjust the process to an online election process. The Committee hosted two virtual Candidates' Meetings and a virtual Meet & Greet, as well as responded to candidates' questions, enforced and provided direction pertaining to the Election Policies & Procedures, and monitored voting activities.

Issues and Recommendations

- The time commitment for this election was much greater than in previous years for members of the Committee and Saitsa due to the adjustments that were required to host an online election.

The expectation is that the time and effort put into this year's election preparation will provide a solid base for future elections, if it is required to continue presenting elections in an online format.

- It was noticed by the Political Committee that the numbering in section 1.0 of the Policies & Procedures is incorrect. The subsections should be numbered 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, ...1.13.

Election Promotion

As physical restrictions were in place on campus this fall, Saitsa was forced to find new ways to promote this election to the student body. Marketing assisted with promo blasts on Saitsa's social media accounts, the Executive Council assisted with promoting via their orientation/classroom talks, and a new online form submission was created for students to express their interest in running in the election, known as the Expression of Interest form. Upon receipt, staff responded to the interested student with further details and instructions pertaining to becoming a candidate for the election.

The revised Election Information Package that was introduced in the EC 2020 election was utilized successfully in this election as well. This is a great resource for students to provide information on what is involved in Saitsa's governance, what is involved in being a candidate as well as what are the expectations if elected.

Issues and Recommendations

- As SAIT shut down all of Saitsa's offices and services due to COVID-19, students were unable to access the Governance & Advocacy office, in person, to obtain election information. Election information had to be acquired from Saitsa's website and social media pages as well as from classroom talks. All inquiries and questions had to be dealt with via email. The on-campus restrictions also prevented Saitsa from advertising the election through election promotion posters on campus.

It is recommended that the Manager of Governance & Advocacy continue to work with members of the Marketing department to develop innovative and alternative ways to enhance current election promotion strategies to adjust to a strictly online student environment.

In addition, it is advised the Governance & Advocacy office work in conjunction with the VP Academic to request SAIT to permit election promotion on the D2L platform. As most students access D2L on a regular basis, it would be a great resource to have available for election promotion.

Nominations and Candidates' Meetings

In order for a nomination to be considered valid, students have to be members of Saitsa in good standing who have paid their Saitsa and SAIT fees in full. They have to obtain 50 signatures from active Saitsa member students and they must attend at least one Candidates' Meeting. Due to COVID-19 on-campus restrictions and online learning environments, the Political Committee felt it was necessary to lower the number of signatures required from 50 to 20 for this election as it was expected the nominees would encounter greater difficulty obtaining the required signatures with the new online format. Nomination packages for the Board of Directors election were available online only.

Nominations opened on September 8 and ended on September 29. Nominees were required to have their nomination packages submitted to the Political Committee by 12pm, noon, on September 22, for the first nomination period, and 12pm, noon, on September 29, for the second nomination period. In an effort to get a minimum of 12 students to submit a nomination package by the close of nominations, the September 29 deadline was extended to 4pm. Unfortunately, the extension did not result in any further nomination packages being submitted. In total, 28 nomination packages were requested but only 10 were followed through on and completed.

There were 10 nominees in attendance for the Candidates' Meetings, with 9 attending the first meeting and 1 attending the second. Both Candidates' Meetings were successfully hosted virtually via Teams.

Issues and Recommendations

- The number of required signatures, 50, for the nomination package is currently too high for an online style election.

The Political Committee recommends for future online elections that the required number of signatures for nomination packages be rolled back to 20.

- A total of 28 students expressed interest via the Expression of Interest form, however only 10 continued through to the next step of becoming a candidate by submitting a completed nomination package.

Though the Expression of Interest process was intended to increase promotion and general understanding of the election process, the increased workload for staff compared to the low 'rate of return' suggests that this process should be reviewed and reconsidered for the next online election.

- The election process for students interested in learning about becoming a candidate can be quite overwhelming and consuming for some.

Saitsa should consider a way to simplify language and submission processes to increase the likelihood that students who are interested in becoming a candidate will not be intimidated or deterred by the process.

- Follow up with students who have expressed interest in becoming a candidate but have not submitted a completed nomination package should be delegated to the Governance & Advocacy Co-ordinator.
- Section 7.1.3 of the Policies & Procedures requires a change to the wording. Currently it reads "...and there are fewer candidates running...", this should be changed to "...and there is an equal number of or fewer candidates running...".
- Section 7.1.3 also contradicts itself where it says, "...ballot shall become uncontested and becomes a yes/no ballot". A yes/no ballot can still be contested. It is recommended to remove the word uncontested from this section.

- It is recommended that the Board consider alternatives to a Yes/No ballot election when there is an insufficient number of candidates running for the available positions. An alternate to this process would see candidates being acclaimed when there are not more candidates running than there are positions available.

Meet & Greet

This year the Meet & Greet was successfully presented virtually on Zoom and live streamed on Facebook. Candidates were asked a variety of questions presented by a moderator. Unlike a typical Meet & Greet where Saitsa sets up booths for candidates where students are able to talk to the candidates over several hours, the Meet and Greet was adjusted to align closer to the EC Panel Night to help the candidates promote their platform and for voters to gain a better understanding of how each candidate may represent them. As with Panel Night, the candidates were provided a variety of questions four days in advance of the event. During the event, candidates were presented the opportunity to introduce themselves, respond to questions and finish the event with a closing statement.

Livestreaming on Facebook of the Meet & Greet was a first for Saitsa with overall feedback from candidates, viewers and staff being extremely positive. Live audience attendance resulted in over 655 unique views, and over 1,460 minutes of viewing of the 120-minute event. To date, the video has been viewed 345 times via Saitsa's Facebook page.

Issues and Recommendations

- COVID-19 restrictions prevented hosting the Meet & Greet live on campus. The Governance & Advocacy office enlisted the help of the Marketing and Events departments to create a virtual format to host this event.

This virtual format of the Meet & Greet was a successful alternative to the in-person, on-campus event that is typically hosted for the candidates. It is recommended as a viable option for the next election if physical restrictions continue to be in place on campus. Saitsa is encouraged to consider the possible benefits of substituting a panel-night event for BOD elections in lieu of the standard Meet & Greet that has been in place for the previous 5 years.

- It is recommended that the word "moderating" be removed from section 4.1.2 c) of the Election Policies & Procedures as there is a potential conflict of interest with the Political Committee if they have to rule on something that took place during a forum/panel.

Campaign Period & Demerit Issuance

Once a candidate had attended a Candidate's Meeting, they were able to begin their campaign. Nine candidates attended the first meeting with the last candidate attending the second meeting. The campaign period ended with the close of polls on October 8 at 4pm.

New this year was the use of SharePoint to store relevant election documentation for the candidates to access. This proved to be an effective resource tool for all. Calendar invites were again used to remind the candidates of important election events.

This election candidates were introduced to the new profile format and submission process that was implemented in the 2020 EC election. Utilizing this new format provided voters with an even platform for candidate comparison. As well, new form submission platforms were created for the candidates to submit their election documents to the Political Committee. Once submitted the documents were directed through the platform to the Committee's email.

Candidates had to adapt to a new way of campaigning this year. In previous elections the majority of a candidate's campaigning was done through the display of posters on campus, classroom talks and face-to-face interactions. This election candidates had to rethink how they could promote themselves and their campaign in a digital world. Social media was the new go-to for campaigning. Candidates used a variety of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to get their campaign message out to their fellow students.

With most classes being online this year, classroom talks looked quite different. The Political Committee added rules to the process regarding classroom talks in order to comply with SAIT's on campus restrictions. Candidates were permitted to present in-person for any on campus classes they were currently attending while all other presentations had to be done virtually or by video. As candidates no longer had physical access to the student body on campus this was their only direct way of connecting with the voters.

This election was a learning curve for all involved. The Political Committee as well as the candidates had to be flexible and adapt as the election progressed.

There were 3 warnings issued this election regarding issues related to campaigning on social media. No demerits were issued.

Issues and Recommendations

- SAIT restricted on-campus activities due to COVID-19 preventing students from being able to campaign physically on campus (post posters, speak directly with students, etc.). Aside from the Saitsa website, candidates' only source to post their campaign posters and campaign message was via social media platforms. This resulted in candidates requiring extra direction from the Political Committee with how to navigate through this process.

It is recommended that the Committee review the guidelines and Policies & Procedures surrounding campaigning on social media and create set guidelines regarding this for future elections.

- The Manager of Governance & Advocacy moved all election documents for the candidates to SharePoint to allow for ease of access to these documents during the election period.

It is recommended to continue with the use of SharePoint for candidate election information as it proved to be effective this election.

It is also recommended that a method be developed for the Political Committee to be able to have restricted/confidential information on the platform that candidates cannot access.

- The new submission platforms created for candidates to submit their documents to the Political Committee proved an effective tool this election. The downside to this process was it created a back log in the Committee's email inbox.

The Committee recommends the Manager of Governance & Advocacy work with Marketing to create a separate platform or email where these documents can be directed that is easily accessible to the Committee.

- Use of the new profile format for the candidates once again proved to be a more equitable way of presenting the candidates to the electors and is recommended to continue with this process.
- It is recommended for Saitsa to consider continuing the self-submission process for candidate videos; previously, Saitsa established the staff-run photo and video shoot process for candidates to keep the presentation platform equal and consistent. With candidates having access to quality recording devices via personal Smart Phones they are able to relax and practice their videos in an environment they are comfortable in which provides the opportunity for increased creativity. The Political Committee should be consulted in this review to ensure any changes align with the guiding principles of the election.
- Additional guidelines pertaining to classroom talks had to be created to adhere to SAIT's on-campus restrictions. As well the Political Committee, with the assistance of the VP Academic, reached out to the instructors via an email to the Deans requesting their co-operation with permitting the candidates' requests to present in their classes.

As strong communication builds good relationships, it is advised the Political Committee continue to effectively communicate with SAIT faculty regarding election processes that will impact their class time and digital platforms (such as D2L). The Committee will continue to reach out to the EC to assist with this communication as they already work closely with the faculty.

Voting, Poster Tear Down and Expense Forms

Once again, Saitsa utilized the services of Simply Voting, an independent third-party company, for this year's election. Polls opened at 8am on October 7 with no issues and closed at 4pm on October 8.

The List of Electors was received by the Manager of Governance & Advocacy from SAIT. Several students contacted the Political Committee advising they did not receive an email with the link to vote. All the emails were located, with the assistance of the Manager of Governance & Advocacy and SAIT staff, in either the student's 'other' folder, 'junk' folder or their 'deleted' folder as it was inadvertently deleted by the student.

Voter turnout was 6.3% for this election. A total of 788 out of the 12,531 eligible electors chose to cast their ballots. It was not possible to have physical polling stations on campus this election due to COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore, it was entirely up to the students to make sure they got on their electronic devices and cast their ballot. Having that physical presence on campus to remind and encourage students to vote is a very effective tool that was unfortunately not accessible to this year's election. This was a significant factor in the lower voter turnout. On both voting days, the Manager of Governance & Advocacy sent out emails to Saitsa members reminding them to vote. It is interesting to note that on the 2nd day of voting after the reminder email was sent out there was a significant spike in the number of votes cast shortly after the email was sent.

As there were only 10 candidates running in this election, the ballot was a Yes/No ballot. Electors were instructed to vote 'Yes', 'No' or 'Abstain' for each candidate. In order for a candidate to be successful in this voting process, they must have received more yes votes than no votes.

Poster tear down was not required this year as posters were not permitted to be posted on campus.

Saitsa's Marketing department developed a new submission platform for candidates to submit their expense forms. Expense forms were to be submitted to the Political Committee no later than 4pm on October 8. It was strongly advised that candidates submit their expense forms and receipts no later than 3:30pm to make sure there were no issues with late submissions via the new system. Candidates were permitted to expense up to \$200 each for campaign expenses, all inclusive.

Voting results were announced this election by way of an email to the candidates. Marketing posted the results on the Saitsa website as well as on social media.

Issues and Recommendations

- It is recommended to continue to send out emails to Saitsa members on both voting days reminding the electors to vote.
- The new submission platform created by the Marketing department was an effective tool for candidates to submit their expense forms. It is recommended that this platform continue to be used for all future elections.
- A delay in the results announcement occurred due to technical difficulties.

The Committee recommends the Governance & Advocacy staff review alternative announcement options for the EC election should it also be required to be online.

- Section 2.3.4 in the Policies & Procedures requires a correction as it contradicts section 11.3.1. Currently it is written as "Polling stations shall be...", it should be written as "Polling stations may be..."

Official Results

CANDIDATES	YES VOTES	NO VOTES	ABSTAIN	ELECTED
Jide Akinwale	328	151	309	Yes
Fatima Bilal	493	84	211	Yes
Arek Gellatly	377	116	295	Yes
Tim Holowachuk	483	80	225	Yes
MacLean Jarvis	404	94	290	Yes
Tola Jimoh	419	111	258	Yes
Shawna LeBlanc	381	114	293	Yes
Krystal Nguyen	374	127	287	Yes
Kelly Jeed Sawadan	313	156	319	Yes
Dawson Thomas	375	129	284	Yes