2018 SAITSA Executive Council Election Report

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MARCH 27
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Jennifer Dotchin, Chief Returning Officer

Executive Summary

This report illustrates the oversight and adherence to the election Policies and Procedures during the 2018 Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Students' Association (SAITSA) Executive Council Election. The Executive Council election was open and fair, with excellent accountability of all candidates and good student participation. This year saw the fewest infractions of the Policies and Procedures ever recorded by this Political Committee. The Executive Council had 16 candidates on the election ballot and 14.57% voter turnout (1,904 out of 13,072 eligible voters).

There are few items to recommendations for future elections in this report as there were a few decisions that the Political Committee made to ensure both fairness and transparency. This included the ability of candidates to undertake campaigning on the SAITSA app as well as the ability to hang posters near escalators. Both were allowed by SAITSA and SAIT Facilities Management operations respectively.

As a student-lead and managed entity SAITSA recognizes the need to hold open and fair elections for positions on the Executive Council. The report makes recommendations from the Chief Returning Officer and Political Committee, however it does not constitute any endorsement of SAITSA.

Of note this year, a new process was trialed to ensure that complaints that were submitted were not frivolous. All complaints are considered of great importance to the Political Committee, and a great deal of resources are used to undertake investigations. This election the Political Committee saw a significant reduction of complaints issued - with only three submitted. These three complaints were all finalized before the end of the election. Each complaint the Political Committee undertook a significant and detailed investigation.

New this year, SAITSA hosted a 'meet the candidates' which was well attended. The Panel night was also live streamed on Facebook, and as of this publication, there were over 1800 views.

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Candidates Elected

The SAITSA Political Committee would like to congratulate all of the candidates, supporters and voters of the 2018/2019 Executive Council election.

The following candidates were the successful in their campaigns:
President: Alysson Torres-Gillett
Vice President Student Life: Jess Beddow
Vice President External: Garrett Koehler
Vice President Academic: Tanya Pittis

Overview

This report highlights the issues and recommendations of the Political Committee activities, nomination periods, the candidates meetings, candidate panel night, and candidate meet and greet, campaign periods, voting, and results.

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

Policies and Procedures

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. A demerit system was used again to ensure that the Election Policies and Procedures were adhered to. This points-based system would entail penalties such as 1 point for improper poster placement, while a 10 points is the highest penalty resulting

from significant infractions such as damage to SAIT and/or SAITSA property (see Appendix A for possible infractions). This year saw the fewest points given with only one demerit point issued for a minor poster infraction.

Nominations

The Political Committee saw 18 nominations from students seeking a position on the Executive Council. To qualify as a candidate, a completed nomination was to be submitted by February 28 or March 7 at 12:00pm. Each candidate was required to obtain fifty signatures from students. Candidates are also required to be:
- In good academic standing with SAIT
- In good standing with SAITSA
- Willing to be a candidate

By the final deadline, 16 candidates had submitted a completed nomination package and opted for running in the Executive Council election. There were a total of 16 candidates for the Executive Council election: 5 for President, 3 for VP External, 5 for VP Academic and 3 for VP Student Life.

Issues and Recommendations:
- Undertake previous report recommendations to update the Policy and Procedures
- No other issues to report this election

Candidates' Meetings

Candidate Meetings were held at the end of each nomination period (February 28 and March 7). 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.

New this year, was the inclusion of crisis and mental health management information. This was included due to the recognition of the challenge and stresses that candidate's face. Information as to where to find support was included in the meetings.

The Political Committee found a discrepancy in the Policies and Procedures of who must attend the Candidate Meeting where the definition and the description do not match. They currently both note that the candidate must attend, and that they can also send a delegate.

Issues and Recommendations:
- Information was provided to candidates about mental health and stress reduction.
- Remedy the Policies and Procedures to align with that the candidate can either send a delegate or must attend, not both.

Campaign Period

There were two decisions made by the Political Committee which were made this election during the campaign period.
1) The use of the SAITSA app for campaign purposes. As this app is available to every person on campus, and was self-promoted, it was deemed to be acceptable for campaigning by candidates.
2) The hanging of posters near escalators was made possible after a candidate question was sent to SAIT facilities Management. SAIT Facilities Management deemed the posting of election material to be acceptable near escalators therefore the Political Committee allowed it.

These decisions were conveyed to all candidates via email.

There was only one demerit point issued and a marked reduction in complaints made this election. In total, 1 candidate obtained a demerit point. The penalty points and candidate complaints were distributed to candidates by email. The complaints were due to two items.

1) Using a 'wedge issue'. Two complainants felt that using a particular challenge or concern, which was not a major issue, was divisive and thus destructive to the election process and to reputations. The Political Committee undertook an in-depth investigation that included interviews, review of audio recordings, and key witnesses of the issue and found the use of wedge issues to be within the current Policies and Procedures.

2) Another complaint was surrounding the possibility that a non-student was campaigning for a candidate.

A number of questions were posed to the Political Committee. There is a need to clarify these in the Policies and Procedures when revised:

- Can clubs endorse candidates and how are clubs allowed to engage candidates etc.? Can clubs be involved in the Campaign? The Political Committee felt that the clubs can endorse and support any candidate and it was out of the jurisdiction of the Political Committee and the candidate to disallow this.
- Can previous elected members (Board, EC) use the previous photographs on posters? The Political Committee did not see the challenge of this use. However, this should be clarified for all candidates.
- And finally, if candidates must declare all items in their budget for items that are already owned such as a Halloween costume or supplied? The Political Committee felt that the type of clothing or supply that was already paid for and couldn't be used to a finish was the delineating factor. For instance, a Halloween costume could continue to be used, however office supplies could run out and therefore should be expensed.

Issues and recommendations:

- The use of candidates using SAIT email is a concern for the Political Committee, and should be clarified by the SAIT. While it is understood that use of global email would be considered Spam, regular use may impede candidates' ability to communicate with SAITSA electorates.
- Clarify those components above in the revision of the Policies and Procedures.

Candidate Panel Night

Candidates were required to attend and participate in the Executive Council Candidate Panel Night. Each candidate answered a series of questions and themes that they were provided ahead of time, as well as questions from the Weal newspaper reporter and new this year, questions from the audience. The debate drew an estimated 50-70 in-house attendees and over 1,800 viewed the live-streamed video on Facebook.

Issues and Recommendations:

- Next year it is recommended to include questions from Facebook live stream to the candidates to encourage further participation.
- Fewer questions from the Political Committee.
- Create guidelines or parameters around Panel Night to ensure transparency.

Meet and Greet

This year a new engagement tactic was undertaken to encourage campaigning and discussion with candidates. This optional event had over 150 participants, and 16 candidates attended. Candidates were provided with treats from SAITSA to support their conversations with voters.

Issues and Recommendations:
- It is important to define rules around SAITSA-organized meet & greets. This includes if it should be mandatory, can candidates stay in booths or can they walk around? Etc.

Voting

The previous voting issues from the Board Elections were rectified and voters received their ability to vote on time. One issue that occurred was a voter who pays SAITSA fees did not receive a voting email. SAIT noted that the entire program of practicum students did not receive it.

Voting opened on March 14 at 8:00am. Emails with voting details were sent to all eligible student voters and voting commenced. On March 15 the voting came to a close at 4:00pm with 14.57% voter turnout (1,904 out of 13,072 eligible voters).

Issues and Recommendations:
- Clarify who is a SAITSA member and who is not with SAIT well before Election Day. Create a mechanism to ensure that all students that pay fees are included.

Expenses and Poster Tear Down

All candidates were able to submit their campaign expenses by 4:00pm on March 15, 2018. Poster tear down was a success, and all candidates worked together to clear main and satellite campuses of poster materials.

Results

President Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Jesse Corbel	352	21
Mitch Holt	145	9
Chelsea Kemp	324	20
Allyson Torres-Gillett	675	41
Alejandro Valiente	148	9
Abstain	164	

VP External Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Ninar Chaachouh	433	29
Garrett Koehler	590	40
Dani Maurice	454	31
Abstain	293	

VP Academic Candidates	Votes	Percentage
Dixie Le Vesconte	166	10
Cletus Oguogho	315	19
Tanya Pittis	510	31
Akhil Sharma	360	22
Ashley Speirs	278	17
Abstain	218	

VP Student Life	Votes	Percentage
Jess Beddow	546	38
Bekah Callaghan	457	32
Donny Nichols	429	30
Abstain	330	