

2023 UTGSU By-Elections Report

Prepared by the Chief Returning Officer

Submitted: December 8, 2023

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Purpose of the Report

This report will provide an overview of the UTGSU 2023 By-Elections, which ran from December 1, 2023 to December 8, 2023.

It is important to recognize that the UTGSU By-Elections were held with a shortened timeline, and therefore many sections of this report will be shorter than a standard elections report. Further, the context of this By-Election was to fill a significant number of vacant seats on the UTGSU Board of Directors through membership voting.

Pre-Elections Activity

The UTGSU gave notice of the By-Elections via the email listserv on Thursday, November 30 after the By-Elections were approved by the Board of Directors. The Board simultaneously implemented, and recommended to the Annual General Meeting, By-law amendments that would create the provisions to better implement the filling of vacancies.

Nominations

The Nomination Period opened at 1:00pm on Friday, December 1, 2023 and ran until December 5, 2023 at 11:59pm. Nominations were advertised over the UTGSU Listserv on November 30, 2023 and December 2, 2023. Nomination forms could be downloaded directly from the website.

In total seventeen nomination forms were returned and a total of sixteen were deemed eligible to run. The one form that was not deemed eligible was due to a lack of full and complete nomination information.

During the Nomination Period, I was responsive to inquiries and questions.

Silent Period

The silent period was from Wednesday, December 6, 2023 until approximately 4:00pm on Thursday, December 7, 2023. During this time the CRO validated nomination forms with the members list received from the university, as well as verify candidate statements. I also used this period to work with UTGSU staff to set up the UTGSU website, Simply Voting page and email reminders for elections voting.

Campaigning and Voting

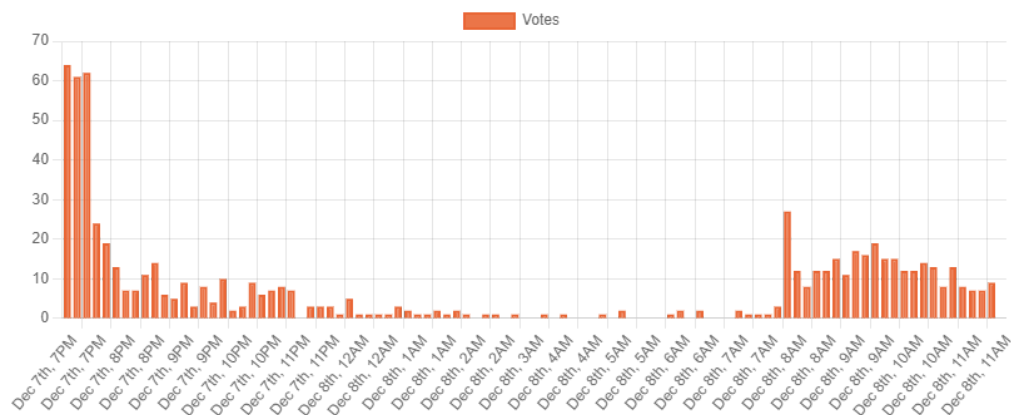
Candidates were able to provide candidate statements for the UTGSU and Simply Voting website. Additionally, Candidates were permitted to give a thirty second campaign pitch at the UTGSU Annual General Meeting.

Voting was hosted on utgsu.simplyvoting.com, and took place from 7:00pm on December 7, 2023 until 11:59am on December 8, 2023. This was a shortened election period to ensure that elections concluded in time for the Winter Closure and for a UTGSU Board of Directors Meeting to approve this election report.

As with past elections, Simply Voting was the UTGSU election platform this year. Student information was given to Simply Voting by the U of T's Office of the Vice Provost of Students. There were some issues related to setting up the ballots for Directors in Division Three due to the contested election. I chose to set the vote based on plurality votes rather than a ranked ballot to ensure the clearest and cleanest process for members to elect candidates. Should a ranked ballot be set up, future CRO's will be required to set up a custom feature with Simply Voting and consider education tools for members on how to cast these ballots.

An initial email reminder to vote was sent out at 7:00pm on Thursday, December 7, 2023 when voting period commenced. Email reminders were sent out to students who did not yet vote at 8:00am on Friday, December 8, 2023. Simply Voting has a graphic that shows what times saw the most votes cast.

I received several inquiries about voting processes and timelines and responded to them accordingly.



Results

Total cumulative votes cast: 704

This is 3.3% of UTGSU's 21,303 members.

Position	Name	Number of Votes Cast	Results
Board of Directors, Division 1	Jonah Dunch	89	CONFIRMED Yes: 51 (72.9%) No: 19 (27.1%) Abstain: 19
	Kanika Josephine Lawton	89	CONFIRMED Yes: 77 (93.9%) No: 5 (6.1%) Abstain: 7
Board of Directors, Division 2	Ameer Ali	215	CONFIRMED Yes: 119 (70.0%) No: 51 (30.0%) Abstain: 45
	Sabeen Kazemi	215	CONFIRMED Yes: 131 (72.8%) No: 49 (27.2%) Abstain: 35
	Abdul Hamed Shekib Mohamed	215	CONFIRMED Yes: 126 (72.8%) No: 47 (27.2%) Abstain: 42
	Lily Ziyue Zhang	215	CONFIRMED Yes: 153 (83.2%) No: 31 (16.8%) Abstain: 31
Board of Directors, Division 3	Julian August Dylan Nickel	247 (5 Abstentions)	ELECTED 148 (14.2%)
	Kevin Gin Sing Xie		ELECTED 127 (12.2%)

	Petra Mary Duff		ELECTED 126 (12.1%)
	Griffin Edward Schwartz		ELECTED 124 (11.9%)
	Amir Hossein Mohammad Zadeh		ELECTED 119 (11.5%)
	Joscelyn van der Veen		ELECTED 119 (11.5%)
	Grisha Taroyan		102 (9.8%)
	Sina Davari		101 (9.7%)
	Fateme Eskandary		73 (7.0%)
Board of Directors, Division 4	Siti Hazirah Binte Mohamad	153	CONFIRMED Yes: 119 (86.9%) No: 18 (13.1%) Abstain: 16

CRO Rulings

The CRO only received one formal complaint during the By-Election process. The CRO did receive additional questions and concerns that were addressed accordingly.

CRO#001

Ruling Code #	CRO#001
Date Received:	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Date of Ruling:	Friday, December 8, 2023
Related Rulings	N/A
Type of Decision	Initial ruling

Nature of Decision	If the complaint is founded then the CRO would be required to determine the appropriate recourse/penalty for the Candidate
Complainant/CRO:	Complainant
Alleged Violation in By-laws or the Code	(G2.2.3) No candidate shall be allowed to run for office with a group or party or slate affiliation, nor can they have the appearance of parties or slates in the elections process.
Relevant Penalties provided in the Code	(G2.9.11) A violation of a clause of Policy G2 for which there is no specified demerit point amount shall garner 5 demerit points

Evidence presented by the Complainant:

The complainant alleges violations of UTGSU Policy G2.2.3 which states "No candidate shall be allowed to run for office with a group or party or slate affiliation, nor can they have the appearance of parties or slates in the elections process." The complainant provided several documents/links including: motions served by the Board of Directors; editorial summaries on UTGSU Board of Directors activity; a call to action to, among other items, create an "organization of a slate of candidates and a campaign to re-invigorate participation in student government"; and a list of signatories for such call to action and their interested capacity.

CRO Decision:

The CRO has carefully reviewed the complaint and evidence presented. The evidence presented was created and shared prior to the By-Election Notice, Nomination and Campaign Period. The CRO followed up with the complainant to receive additional information on whether there was evidence to suggest that slate activity was organized upon. The complainant responded with additional information that the call to action document had been amended up until December 1, 2023. While the evidence does use terms such as 'slate', there is no significant evidence to suggest that there was a group affiliation of candidates during the election cycle, or the appearance of a slate or party during the election. The CRO does recognize that more education needs to be provided on election procedures and policies, especially in relation to fair play in

preparing for elections. The CRO sent an email to all Candidates during the by-elections to remind them that they are running as individuals.

The CRO will recommend additional provisions in the lead up to the General Elections including, but not limited to: information sessions on both positions available and early election information; policy defining and penalizing pre-campaigning; policy defining slates and slate activity; and required candidate information sessions.

CRO Decision	
Penalties Issued	Zero

Costs

Due to the shortened by-election period, candidates were not permitted to make election-related expenses.

CRO Recommendations

The below recommendations should be taken with the context of a shortened By-Election Period.

1. Nomination Forms

Nomination Forms could maybe be reformatted into different formats such as Google Forms or Sheets to make the verification process simpler and also ensure the data protection of students putting down their private information.

2. Divisional Board of Directors Voting Procedures

Further investigation into Simply Voting procedures relating to Board of Director candidate contests needs to be established, including education for members on how to do ranked ballots for multiple candidates seeking plural seats. Further, UTGSU policy needs to be updated to reflect the new Board of Directors composition with multiple divisional seats.

3. Information Sessions

Information sessions should be hosted ahead of elections for interested nominees which goes over the duties of each role, but also introductory information related to preparing for elections and avoiding the perception or actuality of slates.

4. Candidate Sessions

Mandatory candidate sessions should be held prior to Candidate confirmation to ensure all candidates and their volunteers are aware of Election guidelines and rules.

5. Pre-Campaigning Guidelines

Rules need to be established to limit or prohibit pre-campaigning and to avoid the perception or actuality of slates. This is a difficult line to balance when it comes to encouraging democratic participation and inviting members to seek office versus the foundation of slates with affiliated campaigns and strategies.

6. Expansion on Slate Bans

The definition of slates needs to be further clarified to understand the actions which constitute slate formation. This needs to be established within the full timeline of the election process from pre-election notice to the conclusion of election - as well as associated penalties. It also needs to identify whether this pertains to shared campaigns but also to shared resources, volunteers, strategies and tactics.