

SCSU 2019 Fall By-Election

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Chief Returning Officer

Introduction

As stated in the By-laws section of the SCSU Constitution, Fall By-Elections are conducted by the Union during each Fall session. The Elections Procedure Code is the document that governs the administration of SCSU elections. The Elections and Referenda committee, along with the Chief, and Deputy, Returning Officers are hired by the Elections Referenda Committee charged with upholding the spirit and principles of this document. The Chief Returning Officer reports to this committee when deemed necessary, and is responsible for conducting interviews with, and training, the Polling Clerks who will staff the polling stations during the election.

The 2019 Fall Term By-Election was conducted without the aid of a DRO. Due to the CRO's late hiring, and the constitutionally-mandated necessity to hold the elections before Nov. 1, tasks were completed with the help of the Internal Coordinator according to the following timeline:

Sep 30 – advertise the formal opening of the nomination period

Oct 3 – ensure enrollment list is received from the registrar

Oct 3 – nomination period ends

Oct 5 – obtain and organize election supplied

Oct 4 – verify all nominations packages

In the absence of a DRO, the CRO performed all of the following relevant tasks.

Oct 5 – CRO emails candidates about date of All-Candidates Meeting

Oct 12 – begin organizing interviews for polling clerk applicants

Oct 12 – CRO to finalize All-Candidates Meeting material, submits to IC and ED

Oct 21 – All-Candidates Meeting facilitated by the CRO

Oct 21 – candidate list submitted to IC for designing and printing of ballots

Oct 22 – campaign period begins, registering volunteers and approving material

Oct 23-26 – polling clerk interview period, creation of polling clerk training manual

Oct 27 – polling clerks hired, schedule completed, submit manual to IC/ED

Oct 27 – retrieve employment packages from IC/ED for polling clerks

Oct 27 – CRO facilitates polling clerk training

Oct 27-28 – print/cut ballots, set up election kits, register scrutineers

Oct 28 – Voting Day 1

Oct 29 – Voting Day 2

Oct 30 – all polling clerk hiring packages completed and submitted to ED

Oct 30 – Voting Day 3 & Ballot Counting

Oct 30 – provide unofficial result to Elections Referenda Committee

Nov 5 – candidate expense reports submitted.

Nov 5 – submit CRO Report to Elections Referenda Committee

Nov 5-Nov 29 – CRO presents at Board Meeting

The election was held to fill the following vacant board Director positions:

- First Year Representatives (2 positions)
- Director of Anthropology (1 position)

Notice of Elections

Notice of the Fall 2019 By-Elections was published on the SCSU website, though the timeline had to be pushed back by roughly one-week due to the CRO hiring process being conducted late.

Notices were reposted to include dates and locations for the nomination period, campaign period, and the voting period. This occurred before the CRO was hired.

Nominations and Eligible Candidates Executive Elections

Nomination packages were made available for candidates and returned to the Internal Coordinator and approved prior to the hiring of the CRO. Ultimately there were five (5) candidates approved to run for the position of First Year Representative, and one (1) candidate approved to run for the position of Director of Anthropology.

Candidates

The following candidates were deemed eligible to run:

Director of Anthropology (1 position)

1. Ashvika Baskaran

First Year Representative (2 positions)

1. Dhra Chourey
2. Aritri Ghosh
3. Samantha Graham
4. Osasere Imafidon
5. Faizah Islam

All-Candidates Meeting

The All-Candidates Meeting was held on Monday, Oct. 21, in Room SL-232, Student Centre at 5pm. It was attended by all candidates, in person (i.e. no candidates sent proxies). The importance over the Elections Procedure Code was discussed thoroughly, and an overview of the document was presented in the context of the SCSU Constitution and By-laws. All candidates signed a statement of understanding.

During the All-Candidates Meeting, two of the candidates – Dhra Chourey and Faizah Islam – indicated that they would be running as a team under the name ‘Team Dhra and Faizah’, and so cross-campaigning and providing joint campaign materials. A review of the Elections Procedure Code yielded no answer to the question of whether or not there is a deadline for candidates to declare that they are running as a team. As such, the candidates were permitted to run as a team, and thus to appear on the ballot with their team name.

The sole candidate for the Director of Anthropology position, Ashvika Baskaran, was informed by the CRO that, according to SCSU bylaws, she would be acclaimed to the position. Director positions do not require a yes/no ballot if the position is uncontested, as opposed to Executive positions that do.

Campaign Period

The campaign period began on Oct. 22, and extended through the voting period, ending on Oct. 30 with the final closing of the polling stations.

Candidates submitted poster materials both electronically and in-person for the CRO to approve. The CRO made arrangements with candidates to be present in the SCSU office at specific times over the campaign and voting period, so that candidates could have their posters stamped and ready for distribution within 24hrs of approval.

Candidates appropriately registered all volunteers as they joined the campaigns throughout the campaign period.

Polling Clerk Hiring Procedure

Job openings for polling clerks were also advertised on the SCSU website. The CRO conducted interviews with all applicants. Successful applicants were scheduled for the polling clerk training session conducted by the CRO on Sunday, Oct. 27 at 5pm in room

SL-232 in the Student Centre. Several polling clerks indicated that they would not be able to attend this meeting, and so a second meeting was scheduled off-campus for 9pm on the same day. All polling clerks were trained by the end of the day on Oct. 27.

Altogether, nine (9) polling clerks were trained and hired for a total of for a total of twenty-four (24) shifts over the three days of voting. All polling clerk employment forms were handed out to the polling clerks on their first shifts, and all relevant information was gathered from them by the CRO and submitted to the Executive Director by Wednesday night for processing.

Ballot Design/Printing

All ballots were designed and printed in-house at the SCSU office in cooperation with the Internal Coordinator and Creative Director. No ballots were necessary for the Director of Anthropology position, as acclaimed Director positions do not need to be confirmed in a 'yes/no' vote (i.e. as with Executive positions). The ballots for the First Year Representative positions included all five candidate names in alphabetical order and instructions indicating that voters can cast votes for up to two of the candidates on the list. Polling clerks and SCSU staff members assisted with the preparation of the ballots. All ballots were uniquely numbered.

Voting Period

A total of two (2) polling stations were made available to voters from Oct. 28-30, from 10am-6pm on each voting day. The polling stations were located in the Student Centre (SC) and the Bladen Wing atrium (BW). They were staffed by two (2) polling clerks at all times during the allotted voting periods, amounting to twenty-four (24) shifts in total. Morning shifts ran from 9am-1:30pm. Afternoon shifts ran from 1:30pm-6:30pm. At all times, either myself or another polling clerk were on call to act as 'floater' to take the place of clerks that were on break or had to briefly leave their station.

Polling clerks were provided with their 'polling clerk training manuals' so that they were able to consult the manual regarding what instructions they were to follow, and so that they might adequately inform voters with questions about procedure.

Morning polling clerks were instructed that their shifts would begin one hour prior to the opening of the polls at 10am. Each voting day, polling clerks met the CRO at the SCSU office at 9am, and proceeded, with the CRO, to first set up the Student Centre polling

station, followed by the BW polling station. After the polling stations were set up, the CRO visited both stations to construct, seal, and sign the ballot boxes with the polling clerks shortly before the opening of the polls at 10am.

After the closing of the polls at 6pm, the polling clerks closed their stations, and the CRO first visited the SC station to seal and sign the ballot box with the closing polling clerks. The CRO and the polling clerks travelled collectively (with all polling station materials and the ballot box) to the BW station, where this was repeated. Afterwards, the CRO and all poll clerks travelled together (again, with all polling station materials from both stations and the two ballot boxes) to the Campus Police station, where the ballot boxes would be stored for security over the voting period until the ballot count.

This was repeated over each day of voting, so that all votes were spread between six (6) ballot boxes in total.

Overall, the voting process went smoothly due to the fact that the only contest was over the two First Year Representative positions. This meant that only first year students were eligible to vote, simplifying and streamlining the process considerably.

Ballot Count

Three (3) polling clerks were selected by the CRO on the basis of availability, willingness, and equity of shifts, to attend the ballot count with the CRO, after the closing of the polling stations at 6pm on Wednesday. After the ballot boxes from the final day of voting were delivered to the Campus Police station for storage, the CRO and polling clerks took a short break, before beginning their count at approximately 7:15pm the Student Centre, room SL-283 (the Alumni Lounge).

The two candidates running as a team, Dhra Chourey and Faizah Islam, sent an e-mail to the CRO stating that they would be providing a scrutineer for the count. The scrutineer never arrived.

The ballot boxes were separated by polling station, so that the three from SC were placed beside one counting table, and the three from BW were placed next to the other. Two empty cardboard boxes were placed on each counting table. Two polling clerks were assigned to one table, and the third polling clerk and the CRO to the other. The Day 1 ballot boxes for each location were each poured into their respective cardboard boxes, at which point counting began. Both persons assigned to a ballot box would first

verify that the ballot was not spoiled due to missing polling clerk signatures, or more than two candidates' boxes being marked. The ballot would then be placed on to a 'counted' pile, and the vote would be added to tally on the ballot counting sheets provided (six sheets in total, one for each ballot box).

This process was repeated for all ballot boxes to produce a final count. After the final count was recorded, ballots were rolled up inside of their respective counting sheets, re-deposited into their respective ballot boxes, re-sealed using plastic tape, and returned to the Campus Police station.

At no point did the ballot counters disagree over whether or not a ballot was spoiled, or over which candidates were voted for. No recount was necessary.

The process for setting up the room and going over the ballot counting process with the polling clerks, obtaining and returning the ballot boxes, the counting process itself, and returning all necessary materials to the SCSU office, took place over approximately three hours, from 7:15pm-10:15pm.

Rule Violations and Demerit Points

Two rule violations were recorded:

1. **'Team Dhra and Faizah'**: an image was shown to the CRO depicting the candidates campaigning by distributing Timbits to prospective voters, along with their campaign material. The issue here was not the distribution of food while pulling the vote – there are no rules against this in the Elections Procedure Code – but rather the distribution of unauthorized campaign materials, as food is not on the list of pre-authorized materials. The Elections Procedure code states that such materials constitute a campaign expense, and, as they fall outside the list, must be first presented to the CRO for approval, which they were not.

5 demerit points

2. **Samantha Graham**: an image was sent to the CRO depicting a campaign poster remaining up well after the deadline to take posters down.

5 demerit points

The CRO has deemed that no other violations have occurred, despite multiple complaints from the candidates regarding online campaigning over social media, particularly around the issue of friends sharing posts, and whether this counts as 'volunteering'. The rules around online campaigning are vague, and, due to the nature of the medium, the CRO decided that candidates' friends would be allowed to share posts without being registered as volunteers. However, any posts by the candidates themselves had to first be approved by the CRO before posting.

Election Results

No candidates' votes were so close as to warrant a recount. After the ballot count was completed, the final vote tallies were as follows (in order of most to least votes):

FIRST YEAR REPRESENTATIVE

Imafidon, Osasere - 121
 Graham, Samantha - 101
 Islam, Faizah - 79
 Chourey, Dhra - 66
 Ghosh, Aritri - 15
 SPOILED – 2

DIRECTOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Baskaran, Ashvika – ACCLAIMED

The CRO sent the unofficial results to the Chair of the Elections and Referenda Committee later the same night as the ballot count. The Elections and Referenda Committee will publish these results on the SCSU website.

The CRO notified the candidates of the of the unofficial results on Saturday Nov. 2, around 6pm, and reminded them that they must submit their expense forms by Nov. 5 (later extended to Nov. 6, as explained below), as well to take down all remaining campaign material immediately.

Campaign Expense Forms

As of the time of submission of this report, I have reminded the candidates several times since the ballot count to submit their campaign expense reports on time. Three out of six candidates have submitted campaign expense forms (Ashvika Baskaran, Osasere Imafidon, and Samantha Graham). I have extended the period for campaign expense form submissions by one day until Nov. 6 due to my inability to answer relevant questions from candidates in a timely way for the better of one day earlier this week. Two of the other candidates (Dhra Chourey and Faizah Islam) have indicated that

they will submit their team campaign expense form shortly. One candidate (Aritri Ghosh) has not yet submitted a campaign expense report.

UPDATE (Nov. 13, 2019): all of the candidates submitted electronic copies of their expense reports before the Nov. 6 deadline, and have subsequently submitted hardcopies to the CRO.

CRO Recommendations

1. There ought to be clearer guidelines in the Elections Procedure Code as to when teams should be declared. E.g. during the nomination period? At the All-Candidates Meeting? At any time during the campaigning/voting period?
2. Instructions around postering rules ought to be clearer, and elaborated on in the Elections Procedure Code, rather than in their own documents (i.e. the SCSU postering policy, the UTSC postering policy, etc.). The relation between these documents is not entirely clear, and more precise guidelines for candidates to consult about where postering is allowed and where it forbidden would be useful;
3. The number of applicants for the polling clerk position was well below the number necessary to ensure two clerks were able to be at all stations at all times. This was likely due to the by-election being held during mid-term exam season – but, this aside, the election cannot go forward without hiring an adequate number of polling clerks. To avoid a last minute rush, I propose better advertising, and clearer guidelines around eligibility for the poll clerk positions (i.e. only SCSU students? Preference given to SCSU students? Outside hires?);
4. Upon being hired, CROs should be provided with the login and password information for all polling clerk laptops for use over the voting period. Additionally, a CRO login and password for the U of T wifi service would be useful for CROs hired from outside the university;

5. Switch over to using official Elections Canada ballot boxes and seals. The ballot boxes used for this election were prone to structural collapse, which, if occurring, has the potential to invalidate the election results;
6. The CRO ought to be granted a parking pass, as parking is expensive, particularly near to the university. If this is not possible, a process by which CROs can be reimbursed for parking expenditures might be elaborated on;
7. The rules in the Elections Procedure Code as they pertain to online campaigning are vague and imprecise. I think that confusion amongst the candidates could be avoided by strengthening the language here. I also tend towards using a light touch for this and related issues, as social media is notoriously difficult to regulate and possible violations often impossible to confirm. Candidates should not be punished for events that could be reasonably argued to be beyond their control.
8. It would be useful to implement a specific 'post-campaign' penalty section to further incentivize candidates to remove their posters after the election has been concluded.

The CRO respectfully asks the SCSU Board of Directors to accept this report as presented.