



# **SCSU 2021 Spring General Election**

**By: Dan O'Hara**

## **Chief Returning Officer Report**

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## 1. Introduction

As stated in the By-laws section of the SCSU Constitution, the Elections Procedure Code is the document that governs the administration of SCSU elections. The Chief Returning Officer is hired by the Elections Referenda Committee and charged with upholding the spirit and principles of this document. The CRO is usually responsible for conducting interviews with, and training, the Polling Clerks who will staff the polling stations during the election – however, due to this year’s election process being entirely electronic and online, no polling clerks were hired. The CRO hired two Deputy Returning Officers to help administer the election.

Below is a rough timeline of the administrative tasks performed by the CRO and DROs:

- Jan. 1-15, 2021** – research and report on different e-voting platforms to ERC
- Jan. 15, 2021** – hire, train DROs
- Jan. 15-Feb. 13** – re-familiarization with SCSU documents, conducting research on electronic voting codes and making the relevant modifications to the SCSU Elections Procedure Code
- Feb. 8-12, 2021** – nomination period starts, several days of Zoom interviews with prospective candidates picking up nomination packages
- Feb. 8, 2021** – ensure enrollment list is sent from registrar to e-voting platform (this was ongoing)
- Feb. 12, 2021** – nomination period ends
- Feb. 15-18, 2021** – CRO and DROs verify all nomination packages, finalize candidate bios, etc.
- Feb. 18, 2021** – CRO e-mails candidates about All-Candidates Meeting
- Feb. 19, 2021** – All-Candidates Meeting (5pm), get campaign expense forms + statement of understanding forms
- Feb. 19-23, 2021** – begin approval of candidate campaign material (ongoing)
- Feb. 23-Mar. 4, 2021** – campaign period begins midnight, finalize candidate lists, e-voting setup, register volunteers and scrutineers, respond to questions, investigate and respond to allegations of violations of the Code (ongoing)
- Mar. 2, 2021** – voting day 1 (begins 9am)
- Mar. 3, 2021** – voting day 2
- Mar. 4, 2021** – voting day 3 (ends 5pm) + ballot counting
- Mar. 5, 2021** – scrutineering process followed by providing unofficial result to Elections Referenda Committee, results published

Much of the information that will follow is merely a summary of the day-by-day tasks that comprise administering the elections process. Obviously important issues will be discussed extensively in a separate section.

## 2. Notice of Elections

Notice of the SCSU 2021 General Election was published on the SCSU website.

Notices were reposted to include dates for the nomination period, campaign period, and the voting period.

## 3. Nominations Period

Nomination packages were made available for candidates after three days of Zoom meetings with the CRO and DROs and returned to the CRO, at which point the CRO reviewed packages to ensure that they were complete and that all prospective candidates eligible by ensuring that all relevant information was present in the package, and through a process of verifying the status of students that had provided their names, student numbers, and signatures to the prospective candidates (a minimum of 50 for director candidates, and 100 for executive candidates).

One prospective candidate fell short of the required nominations, while another never returned the package. The rest of the candidates qualified to proceed to the next phase, attending the All-Candidate Meeting. One candidate withdrew their candidacy before the start of the campaign period. Candidates were identified as part of one of two teams (CONNECT UTSC and MOTIVATE UTSC), or as independents.

During this period an 'Elections' tab was added to the SCSU website with general information about the elections as well as candidate biographies published at the start of the campaign period.

## 4. Candidates

<b>President</b>	Abdillahi	Sarah	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>President</b>	Chaudhry	Eesha	CONNECT UTSC

<b>VP Academics</b>	Sayed Abdel Kader	Waad	CONNECT UTSC
<b>VP Academics</b>	Rahman	Rimsha	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>VP Campus Life</b>	Clement	Michael	CONNECT UTSC
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<b>VP Campus Life</b>	Ho	TJ	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>VP Campus Life</b>	Sobowale	Michael	

<b>VP Equity</b>	Kamalakaran	Abarna	CONNECT UTSC
<b>VP Equity</b>	Murray	Isaiah	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>VP Equity</b>	Ouedraogo	Anais	

<b>VP External</b>	Ahmad	Farah	CONNECT UTSC
<b>VP External</b>	Ismail	Tinasri	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>VP Operations</b>	Chan	Bruce	CONNECT UTSC
<b>VP Operations</b>	Mai	Andy	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Anthropology</b>	Parvin	Fa	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Anthropology</b>	Samiya	Safia	

<b>Director Arts, Culture &amp; Media</b>	Gordiychuk	Anastasiya	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Arts, Culture &amp; Media</b>	Suleman	Sofia	CONNECT UTSC

<b>Director Biological Sciences</b>	Chourey	Dhra	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director Biological Sciences</b>	Krishna	Gautham	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Biological Sciences</b>	Sathiaseelan	Shobika	

<b>Director Computer &amp; Mathematical Sciences</b>	Rautela	Janvi	CONNECT UTSC
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<b>Director Critical Development Studies</b>	Malik	Muntaha	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Critical Development Studies</b>	Urbach	Jessica	CONNECT UTSC

<b>Director English</b>	Afzal	Maidah	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director English</b>	Rahman	Nisa	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director French &amp; Linguistics</b>	Hamdan	Leena	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director French &amp; Linguistics</b>	Maqsood	Aytha	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Health Studies</b>	Ahamat	Khalisa	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Health Studies</b>	Jamal	Omer	CONNECT UTSC

<b>Director Historical &amp; Cultural Studies</b>	An	Seokjun (Edward)	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director Historical &amp; Cultural Studies</b>	Grey	Victoria	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Human Geography</b>	Munir	Anika	CONNECT UTSC
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<b>Director International Students</b>	Liu	Ziyu	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director International Students</b>	Yi	Angela	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Management</b>	Haggag	Zeyad Elsayed	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Management</b>	Sheng	Siqi (Vivica)	CONNECT UTSC

<b>Director Philosophy</b>	Juneja	Devesh	
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<b>Director Physical &amp; Environmental Sciences</b>	Fine	Maxwell	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director Physical &amp; Environmental Sciences</b>	Vaid	Yumna	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Political Science</b>	Jiang	Sophia	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director Political Science</b>	Chandrasegar	Pirakasini (Kashi)	MOTIVATE UTSC

<b>Director Psychology</b>	Ali	Eshel	
<b>Director Psychology</b>	Edwards	Janeve	MOTIVATE UTSC
<b>Director Psychology</b>	Hoan	Elaine	CONNECT UTSC

<b>Director Sociology</b>	Garrido	Brooklyn	CONNECT UTSC
<b>Director Sociology</b>	Marvia		MOTIVATE UTSC

## 5. All-Candidates Meeting

The All-Candidates Meeting was held on Friday, Feb. 19 at 5:00 PM over Zoom. It was attended by all eligible candidates, except for one, with whom I met within 24 hours of the original meeting. The importance of the Elections Procedure Code was discussed thoroughly, and an overview of the document and how it was modified to accommodate an online, electronic context was presented. Candidates signed a statements of understanding, and returned them to me via e-mail shortly after the meeting.

Three positions – Dir. Anthropology, Dir. English, and Dir. Philosophy – were uncontested. The sole candidates for these positions were declared acclaimed. As per the EPC, while uncontested executive positions must be subject to a yes/no vote, uncontested director positions are ruled acclaimed.

## 6. Campaign Period

The campaign period began on Feb. 23 at midnight, and extended through the voting period, ending on Mar. 4, with the closing of the polls at 5:00 PM.

Candidates submitted electronic campaign material via email for approval after the All-Candidates Meeting. The CRO and DROs remained available and active through the duration of the campaign period.

Candidates appropriately registered all volunteers (though they were few in number) as they joined the campaigns throughout the campaign period. Candidates were also vigilant in getting content approved by the CRO before posting.

## 7. Negotiations with Electronic Voting Services

It is worth noting here that we had to switch online voting platforms nearer to the voting date than we would have liked to due to an unforeseen issue regarding our original selection's unwillingness to sign a contract with the UTSC administration due to a confidentiality clause. The administration, for its part, refused to share any student information with us beyond names and student IDs, and insisted on exchanging information with our chosen platform directly. We had initially selected Electionbuddy as our platform and sought to move forward with them, but, after some time had passed with no information being exchanged between them and UTSC administration, a meeting with Electionbuddy was scheduled at which it was explained to us that they would be unable to sign on to the university's terms without extensive legal wrangling first. This was the first we had heard of this over several weeks of contact with representatives from both the UTSC administration and Electionbuddy. With just under two weeks until voting was set to begin, we went back to the drawing board, and quickly selected another platform that I had researched – eBallot – who promptly signed the university's agreement and began working on the data sent to them.

## **8. Voting Period**

The voting period began at 9am on Mar. 2 and continued through to 5:00 PM on Mar. 4. Voting remained open at all hours. Voters received their electronic ballot in the form of an email sent to their University of Toronto student email addresses. The emails contained a dynamically generated, unique link that led voters to a single page presenting all of the candidate choices for the positions for which they were eligible to vote. Voters proceeded down the list of candidates to the end, where, after selecting their choices, they would submit their ballots.

I will note that I received a total of five queries from voters, one being a question as to whether or not abstention/spoil was a possible voting option, and the others being questions as to why the voters appeared to be ineligible to vote in certain contests. In response to the first, I responded that abstention/spoil was not an option (and is not mandated by SCSU bylaws or the Elections Procedure Code), but that I would note the complaint and suggestion down in the CRO report. In response to the other complaints, I could only say that neither elections officials, nor SCSU as a whole, are responsible for maintaining the voter database, for the reason that the only people that have access to it are the UTSC administration. At no point did I receive, or was able to view, the voter database detailing the program and registration status of students at UTSC, which was sent directly from UTSC to eBallot.

## 9. Ballot Count

The voting results were automatically tabulated by eBallot's electronic voting platform and sent to the CRO the next day on Mar. 5, along with a certificate from eBallot stating that the election was free of tampering and of irregularities of any kind. The CRO set up a scrutineering process in place of the normal process in place for paper ballot elections, whereby teams would be allowed to appoint three scrutineers, and independent candidates one scrutineer, to review the 'raw vote data' (e.g. a list of all the times any given candidate was voter for sorted by time of vote cast). Scrutineers were invited to a Zoom meeting where the CRO used Zoom's screenshare function to show scrutineers first the eBallot certificate, and then the raw vote data opened in an Excel document contained in an email sent directly from eBallot. The CRO/DROs were split between three Zoom breakout rooms and used screenshare to move down the list of voting timestamps so that the scrutineers could view for themselves the list of votes cast. Some scrutineers left fairly quickly, while others stayed until the end of the process, but all conveyed their satisfaction with the process.

## 10. Rule Violations and Demerit Points

Anais Ouedraogo

- 5 points – active social media account shortly before the start of campaign period

Bruce Chan

- 10 points – social media circulation of document containing misinformation about the electoral process

Eesha Chaudhry

- 35 points + disqualification – accessing and circulation of confidential student information (please see below for a prolonged discussion of this ruling)

Sarah Abdillahi

- 15 points – repurposed social media page entirely for campaign

## 11. Election Results

Below are the *final counts* for each position:



President**Sarah Abdillahi - MOTIVATE UTSC****APPROVE 1201**

DISAPPROVE 370

VP Academics**Rimsha Rahman - MOTIVATE UTSC 909**

Waad Sayed Abdel Kader - CONNECT UTSC 662

VP Campus Life**TJ Ho - MOTIVATE UTSC 1075**

Michael Clement - CONNECT UTSC 446

Michael Sobowale 50

VP Equity**Isaiah Murray - MOTIVATE UTSC 774**

Abarna Kamalakumaran - CONNECT UTSC 628

Anais Ouedraogo 169

VP External**Farah Ahmad - CONNECT UTSC 805**

Tinasri Ismail - MOTIVATE UTSC 766

VP Operations**Andy Mai - MOTIVATE UTSC 900**

Bruce Chan - CONNECT UTSC 671

Director Anthropology**Fa Parvin - MOTIVATE UTSC 24**

Safia Samiya 12

Director Arts, Culture & Media**Anastasiya Gordiyuchuk - MOTIVATE UTSC 78**

Sofia Suleman - CONNECT UTSC 46

Director Biological Sciences**Gautham Krishna - MOTIVATE UTSC 115**

Dhra Chourey - CONNECT UTSC 87

Shobika Sathiaseelan 78

Director Critical Development Studies**Muntaha Malik - MOTIVATE UTSC 50**

Jessica Urbach - CONNECT UTSC 40

Director English**Maidah Afzal - CONNECT UTSC 34**

Nisa Rahman - MOTIVATE UTSC 25

Director French & Linguistics

**Aytha Maqsood - MOTIVATE UTSC 63**

Leena Hamdan - CONNECT UTSC 35

Director Health Studies

**Khalisa Ahamat - MOTIVATE UTSC 101**

Omer Jamal - CONNECT UTSC 96

Director Historical & Cultural Studies

**Victoria Grey - MOTIVATE UTSC 33**

Seokjun (Edward) An - CONNECT UTSC 26

Director International Students

**Angela Yi - MOTIVATE UTSC 204**

Ziyu Liu - CONNECT UTSC 116

Director Management

**Zeyad Elsayed Haggag - MOTIVATE UTSC 231**

Siqi (Vivica) Sheng - CONNECT UTSC 109

Director Physical & Environmental Sciences

**Maxwell Fine - CONNECT UTSC 67**

Yumna Vaid - MOTIVATE UTSC 60

Director Political Science

**Pirakasini (Kashi) Chandrasegar - MOTIVATE UTSC 90**

Sophia Jiang - CONNECT UTSC 76

Director Psychology

**Janeve Edwards - MOTIVATE UTSC 216**

Elaine Hoan - CONNECT UTSC 213

Eshel Ali 45

Director Sociology

**Marvia - MOTIVATE UTSC 41**

Brooklyn Garrido - CONNECT UTSC 26

**The positions Director of Computer & Mathematical Sciences (Janvi Rautela – CONNECT UTSC), Human Geography (Anika Munir – CONNECT UTSC), and Philosophy (Devesh Juneja) were acclaimed.**

The CRO sent the unofficial results to the Chair of the Elections and Referenda Committee once the scrutineering process was complete, and, after the ERC convened

for a brief meeting, the results were published on the SCSU website in the form of the entirety of eBallot's report.

**NOTE:** a candidate pointed out a discrepancy on the second page of eBallot's report that counted the total votes cast as 1570, whereas the tally for votes cast for Executive candidates (which should have been equal to this) added up to 1571. I immediately notified eBallot about this discrepancy, and they explained that while the results are automatically tabulated, the numbers on the second page of their report are manually transcribed. The full email reply from eBallot is below:

"Hi Dan - good evening and thanks for sharing the results copy.

I won't be able to reach the team to confer at this time, but I can provide some brief context. The Page 2 "Voter Turnout" section of the report is manually assembled in parts onto the report template so I believe that there is a transcription error, only on this page.

**That said,** I am able to independently validate the following:

- The Voter Turnout graph is still accurate, as is the percentage
- The per-question tabulated results match the counts as described in the results report
  - The tabulated results come directly from the software and are fully automated
  - Manually checking the anonymous 'raw votes' data, I confirmed the counts for the two 'closest' elections in the "Director Psychology" and "Director "Physical & Environmental Sciences" races.

Based on the above, I can express my confidence in the accuracy of the position counts in the 'Results by Question' section of the results report.

At the earliest opportunity, I'll be following up with the team to review this. In the meantime, apologies for any confusion and please let us know if you have any further questions.

Best,

Jonathan Liu  
**eBallot | Votenet Solutions, Inc.**  
[eballot.com](http://eballot.com)"

I received a corrected report from eBallot the next day, and it was immediately posted to the website.

Additionally, I received one request from a scrutineer regarding questions about the raw data they observed, and three requests from candidates due to tight vote margins, for eBallot to take a second look at the voter data for their elections. eBallot confirmed to me that, upon review, their conclusions had not changed, and that the final counts were correct and free of irregularities.

## 12. Campaign Expense Forms

The CRO reminded the candidates several times over the campaign period, and both during and after the voting period, that campaign expense forms were to be submitted either in-person or over email within 72hrs of the closing of the polls. All candidates complied.

## 13. Problems & CRO Recommendations

### 1. Campaign period to begin in morning rather than midnight sharp

- The reason for this suggestion is so that the candidates can be well-rested for the start of the campaign period. For paper ballot elections, candidates and volunteers stay very late to ensure that their material is distributed. They should not have to worry about walking or getting a ride home in the early hours of the morning.

### 2. Removal of financial penalties for accrual of demerit points

- The fact of wealth inequality means that some candidates will be able to financially handle being awarded demerit points better than others, and so breaking the rules is actually incentivized for wealthier candidates, putting their less wealthy opponents at a disadvantage. For this election, I awarded financial penalties in line with the clear instructions in the Elections Procedure Code. However, in future elections, I propose that financial penalties be stricken from the code and replaced with a more egalitarian way of penalizing candidates for breaking the rules.

### 3. Consideration of mandating the inclusion of an 'abstain' option in future online elections

- The current Elections Procedure Code allows for ballots to be designed without the inclusion of an 'abstain' or 'spoil' option. This is fine with normal, paper ballots, because spoiled ballots are included in the final count. But in online and electronic elections in which the entire list of contests must be filled out in order to proceed to submit the ballot, a 'abstain' or 'spoil' option should be present so as to allow voters to vote for

no one, or to only vote for candidates in certain contests without having to vote in all contests.

4. Ensuring that voters can submit electronic ballots without having to fill out ballots for all electoral contests

- Taking the above into consideration, at the very least, voters should be able to leave selections blank.

5. Another review of the Elections Procedure Code and Appendix for the sake of clarifying the rules around online campaigning

- There were a number of instances where rules as they appear in the election procedure code needed to be modified or clarified in practice, or ended up just being impractical. For example, the rules disallowing the conversion of previously created groups/pages into forums for campaigning, while allowing candidates to campaign using their personal pages, seemed appropriate in theory, but in practice almost impossible to apply consistently. There are other such instances of vague or contradictory wording around online campaigning in particular that require clarification.

6. Explicit rules addressing the use of the circulation of candidates' private and confidential information as a campaign tactic

- While the 'fair play' guidelines offer a clear and effective means of dealing with such situations, it would be useful to have it stated explicitly that the CRO cannot accept such submissions as 'evidence' due to the potential legal and other ramifications of accessing another person's private information that has been circulated without their consent, regardless of what the circulated documents are said to contain. It would also set a terrible precedent in which candidates are incentivized to gather confidential information on one another in a race to disqualify one another.

7. Explicit rules explaining that the CRO will not adjudicate anonymous complaints

- As with the previous suggestion, explicit rules should be created that state that anonymous complaints will not be adjudicated. Filing complaints deemed frivolous or malicious comes with a penalty, and anonymity by definition seeks to remove any ability to identify the accuser.

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