

VUSAC Annual General Meeting Minutes
Friday, November 22, 2013. Old Vic Room 323, 5:15pm

71 students in attendance.

Meeting is called to order at 5:15pm.

Christian moves to approve agenda. Robert seconds. 63 in favor, 1 abstaining. Agenda passes.

– Introduction – Zack Medow

Welcome, everyone. VUSAC hosts an Annual General Meeting, which is a lot like a caucus meeting, to make sure all the Vic student voices are heard. Each student here gets a vote, and everyone can speak. This meeting is to discuss how everyone feels about VUSAC, student politics; the way things are being run and operated, etc. VUSAC has for a long time been a little too closed in our opinion so we hope this will bring people from the fringes of our decision making process more to the center. An issue we face is that between all of our groups, student government touches numerous students, but when it comes time to discuss politics, the room isn't full. But we want to make sure student politics are open to all students, so we hope this helps.

Zack moves for approval of the AGM Chair; Gabriel (Gabe) Zoltan-Johan. Robert Fan seconds. 65 in favor. 2 abstaining. Motion passes.

– Opening Remarks – Gabriel (Gabe) Zoltan-Johan

Before we actually go through with this, I appreciate you all coming. When it comes to discussion, I want this to go as smoothly as possible. So the speakers will come up to the podium to speak. Everyone else must be chosen to speak and cannot speak out of line. In addition, if people think the discussion period should be extended, anyone can motion for that.

– CLC Update – Samantha Hartlen

Hey everyone! I just wanted to do a quick update. CLC is a role that's here for you guys in a variety of different capacities. My term as a CLC is coming to an end at the beginning of next week, so there will be a new CLC soon. But in the interim before the new one comes in, anyone in the Dean's Office will happily help you. I'm moving to central U of T, and I will have a new email address which I will send out. It's been a joy working with you all and I'll miss you all.

– Student Projects Update – Angela Sun

As all of you probably know, the deadline for student projects round one was today. However, if you have a really good reason for why you couldn't send in yet, email me and tell me why and I'll probably still take it! We currently have \$64,833.99 left! The next round of student projects applications will be in January. We'll be having a website launch soon so you can see all the passed project applications, and you can see who the committee members are, etc. if you have any questions please email me at studentprojects@vusac.ca.

– Student Societies Summit – Jelena Savic

I'm going to be talking about what's going on with UTSU and all the student societies across campus. Last year we had a referendum for fee diversion to VUSAC because of a variety of issues. Since this referendum, VUSAC has had many meetings as to what we would do with the results of that referendum. The way referenda work with VUSAC is that we need a 15%+ voter turnout, and majority of those voting yes. But if the voter turnout is less than 15%, the vote goes to VUSAC to decide. So what VUSAC voted was to explore what a government would look like if we did get fee diversion. There were a lot of letters going back and forth between the different colleges who also had referenda. Central admin recognized there's a huge issue with student politics, so Trin, EngSoc, and VUSAC were put in a room with UTSU reps to try to have a mediation session to address the issues. UTSU reps were in another room and the mediator is a prof whose professional job is to mediate large, political union disputes. That whole 7-hour thing failed. That's basically the scale of the issue; a professional mediator who's dealt with huge disputes couldn't solve this. UTSU offered a ton of things, but what we wanted was bigger changes than what they offered. Both sides were totally uncompromising. After that, we went to Governing Council and that was to decide what we should do next. Governing Council realized this wasn't going to be an easy issue to deal with. I opted not to speak at this meeting with Governing Council because I wanted to highlight just how opposite the two views are. My position would be in the middle, but I really wanted Governing Council to see the complete extremes that were offered by the opinions of the other colleges. So Governing Council said we'll have a discussion in one table with everyone there. Then nothing happened for a while, but then we started having these Student Society Summit meetings. Every student society president was there. UTSU didn't send their president or vice president, which creates a problem because the people they did send don't know everything or can't really speak on everything. We have 3 professors leading these discussions and we start with the foundational principles. For example, how can you justify making students pay a fee despite this student never participating in anything? And we each had to answer; Vic said it justifies our existence and creation of community. Then we talked about what a proper government should ideally look and function like. We did come to a consensus on some things. But then when it came to nitty-gritty details, we faced a lot of resistance from UTSU. So electoral reform (more open, accessible elections), and student representation at UTSU (where does it work, where does it fail; college presidents don't get a vote at certain meetings, while some students that never even stepped foot on Vic get to vote on Vic stuff), were the major issues discussed.

– Discussion

Student: Is UTSU rep from Vic still Shak?

Jelena: Shak and Lynn.

Student: Is there a record for how many VUSAC meetings they've attended and how many they've missed?

Zack: Lynn has attended 2/3 and Shak has attended none this year.

Robert: Is Shak here today?

Student: No, he's picking up his brother.

Zack: At the end of last year this (UTSU stuff) was a huge conversation which was what the first ever VUSAC AGM has been on. And since then, there's really been no discussion about it, so we want that flowing again. Please ask if you have questions.

Jelena and I don't conclusively know what's going to happen, because so much is out of our hands, but our position has been sort of in this middle ground where we advocate for electoral reform and such.

Student: Is there any plan that if it's shown that UTSU is not doing a good job, will change actually come from this?

Jelena: We ask that ourselves every time we go. Right now, every student society is agreeing on everything, but UTSU is disagreeing. So the report, we think, will show that. Governing Council definitely has the power to change things, but I don't know how much sway just because it would lead to union problems. But there are groups right now that they're withholding money from as a sort of incentive. But their bylaws say, for example, presidents can't have a vote on the board of directors. So we'd need to change all sorts of laws and bylaws, so it's pretty messy at this point.

David: If VUSAC at the end of the year does vote to defer fees, does that have to be approved by Governing Council?

Jelena: Yes it does have to go through that. But the reason they didn't approve fee diversion this year was because they thought we could work that out over a meeting or something. But if it's shown that UTSU won't change anything in the way they're functioning, then we can ask for fee diversion again, but we'll have an additional leverage point.

Angela: How close do you think Trin and EngSoc are to diverting fees?

Jelena: It's an interesting debate because there's Kinesiology, EngSoc (engineers), Law, and Medicine faculties in these debates as well. EngSoc argues that UTSU just doesn't represent engineers, period. They don't fit the same as the Arts & Science kids. So they do have a very unique group of students they represent, and so does Kin, so they're going for fee diversion. But Trin is closer to our side where they're willing to compromise and try to change UTSU rather than fee diversion.

Student: Are you still looking into what's going to happen with fee diversion and how accessible it is?

Jelena: No, we haven't. We're completely dedicated to this conversational process. Honestly, fee diversion is probably not a good idea because we don't have the time to research all sorts of laws and stuff, but we need them to be way more accessible and representative.

Student: Who represents us on the student union; students or someone else? And if by students, why is their opinion so radically different from those from student societies.

Jelena: The number of reps at UTSU is determined by how many students are in the college. Those students are elected in the UTSU elections. They can only be voted for by Vic students, but they run along the UTSU slate. Vic reps can actually go along the slate and run with that slate. So being elected alongside these people, your interests aren't really to vote against them at that point. Also, your fiduciary duty is to the UTSU. You don't want the union to crumble; you have a duty to uphold how that union functions. For example, they wanted the reps to take 3 courses. Execs said we can't do that because we have too many responsibilities. But the point was to get those people to become full-time students so that they can represent full-time students.

Student: Last year, the idea was the get health care and dental diverted to VUSAC. So if we're not doing fee diversion, what are we doing?

Jelena: Right, but ideally we don't want to have to divert fees at all. Ideally UTSU would just function the way we want them to function and make them accessible to students. The problem is that the presidents sit on Board of Directors meetings, but they don't recognize us as representing Vic students. Yet a random Vic student can represent Vic students despite never having been involved at Vic at all. So the student societies are not recognized as representatives of the students.

Student: So were Shak and Lynn randomly selected?

Jelena: They ran in the UTSU elections and they were voted in. But the UTSU rules don't say that they have to attend all VUSAC meetings or be involved at Vic.

Student: Why can't we have a re-vote?

Jelena: They won't allow us with their bylaws.

Zack: Last year, it seemed impossible to negotiate any points. But since the referendum, Governing Council is now involved and they said they will facilitate our discussion. So now, instead of doing something really radical, the university got involved and we can actually make reforms to the structure, rather than just leaving it completely. Circumstances have changed and now that the university is helping us to have these discussions, fee diversion has become the last resort.

Student: From what I understand, we don't have any UTSU reps here. Would you be able to give me an unbiased opinion on what improvements should be made?

Jelena: I can try. Basically, we all gathered and talked about the ideal student government. We want all students to feel that they have a voice and have the power to change things. But, when we propose changes, their stance is that the way they currently function is democratic and accessible. Our argument is that it took so many AGMs and it was just way too hard to make any changes, so it's completely inaccessible and requires thousands of signatures. Wow, that was not unbiased. Sorry. We're claiming that even though these processes exist, the scale of them is so huge and the amount of effort it would take is so cumbersome that they're not accessible anymore. But UTSU argues that they are accessible. I think the scale issue is a big concern.

Ben Coleman: I am actually a representative from UTSU. Sorry for not saying that earlier. But in addition to the Vic directors, there are also two reps that represent all the Arts & Science students [which I am one of]. Just to clarify, the responsibilities of Board members is to report on UTSU, but there's also a responsibility to report from the UTSU to student societies, but this year UTSU has been trying to hear more from student societies.

Komal: UTSU Vic reps are assessor members of VUSAC. So doesn't our VUSAC constitution say they are supposed to attend our meetings?

Zack: The only thing we can do is that if they miss a certain number of meetings, we can tell them they're not invited to meetings anymore. They will still be Vic's reps to UTSU, but no longer assessor members of VUSAC. So you can see there's a total lack of federalism. Ultimately, they have no fiduciary or constitutional responsibilities to VUSAC, just to the UTSU.

Komal: Is there something VUSAC can do?

Jelena: That's something we're advocating for. There's nothing in the UTSU constitution giving them consequences for not coming to our meetings. So we want to change it so they are held accountable by us.

Jade: I really do support the summit. I wasn't for the idea of fee diversion last year because my main concern was if Vic student life took on UTSU responsibilities, Vic student life would drastically change, because I really like how things happen at Vic and most students are invested in the idea of student life, and what that really means is often about community, not politics. Instead of going with fee diversion which would affect the student experience, I see this summit as looking more at how can we collaborate and talk to each other as colleges.

Student: UTSU has a habit of sending people to sit in on meetings without introducing them. So I think it's inappropriate to not say that you're here as a UTSU rep.

Ben: Again, I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself earlier because I didn't think the conversation was going here. I'm not an executive and I actually didn't run with a slate, so I'm actually not here to be a spy at all. I honestly just didn't realize that this is where the conversation was going to go. Also, if 15% of Vic students petition, you can impeach a member of UTSU, but you'll still need to have a referendum afterward.

Jelena: To put that in perspective, you'd need 600 people to sign something saying someone on UTSU is not doing a good job. And then you'd need to have a referendum afterwards. So is that accessible? Debatable.

Student: What are the turnout rates for UTSU elections and why can't VUSAC endorse a representative?

Jelena: I'm not sure what the turnout was. (Ben says: About 6-10% in previous years, and 15% recently.) Yeah, not good. And getting someone from VUSAC to run has been tried in the past, but then funding for that scale of elections is very difficult for most students. You're running basically against a machine so it's extremely hard.

Student motions to extend discussion by 5min. Another student seconds. 46 approve. 5 opposed. 13 abstaining. Time extended.

David: Trin's rep ran for both positions, independent of one another. He wasn't necessarily nominated by Trin or anything.

Angela: I believe in the VUSAC constitution it says you can't be both an exec member and assessor member.

Zack: Just to add, the hope for this summit is to solve these issues in a bigger, structural way. So the goal is to create a new system that more people can buy into and trust. So, it's not very trusting or a good style of politics to actually endorse certain people.

Robert: I think student leaders should be responsible and fulfill their duties and care about people. I want people to really represent students and be approachable.

Student: Would you want a vote for student council president or how do you want to choose reps?

Jelena: Well we want them to be voted for in the VUSAC elections. The issue with the Board of Directors is in no way to do with Vic's actual representatives. We're talking about problems with the organization as a whole, so anything to do with the specific reps from Vic is not being entertained.

Robert motions to extend discussion by 1 min. 3 in favor, 36 opposed, 19 abstaining. Motion does not pass.

– VUSAC Board of Directors/Representative Structures – Zack Medow

This one is a little bit more abstract so bear with me. Fundamentally, UTSU respects VUSAC as sole representative of Vic students. Do we really represent them, though? Yes, but we respect our own fault. This AGM was an invitation extended to 3,400 students, but we have about 70 here. Also, our voter turnout is not good. So we have to recognize our own deficit and fix things. I don't buy that people are lazy and uninterested; I think there's a structural reason as to why people don't get involved in VUSAC. I think people really don't have enough representation. We're supposed to be doing it, but what is really the nature of representation and how do we make sure that everyone is covered? So we want to look at how we could improve this. Should we introduce a Board of Directors to VUSAC? It could literally look like anything. I want to open the floor now to see if people are interested in pursuing this idea and seeing what our communities are and how we would represent them. I want the conversation extremely open so I just want to hear ideas.

– Discussion

Jade: I like the idea of making sure students feel represented but I have two concerns. One is the reality that most elected positions at Vic often go unopposed, and two why that is. Also, I can't speak to an uninvolved student because I am an involved student, so I can't say in confidence that an uninvolved student would feel the same way. So how do we get uninvolved students to access, like for example to the listserv? So I think we need to capitalize on different forms of communication.

Alan: What about giving different representations to the different faculties at Vic? People studying in different faculties have different needs.

David: I just want to address the whole "unopposed" thing. Well I think it has to do more with the specificity of particular roles because people may not feel they can fill that role. Also, I'm very for this idea of board of directors, but the general dividing line for constituencies I find is residence and commuter students. So these two voices have different concerns.

Jade: Year to year, though, the opposition does fluctuate. For example, sustainability hasn't gone unopposed in several years. Also, if you look back at past positions that existed on VUSAC they're really weird.

Angela: I'm not sure about the Board of Directors idea because I don't think there's enough variety of Vic students that run for VUSAC, but I feel like putting up more positions will pretty much just be the same already-involved people that will get involved. Also, I think the reason people might not go for a role is because of publicity deficits, but also being a rep on these committees and meetings is not the most exciting things because most things are things we don't understand, or they're things we can't speak on because they're so intrinsic to the running of admin and council, so it can get awkward and intimidating and there's so much insider stuff. And I think that needs to be addressed with the staff and with admin.

Dan: Looking at the ratio of commuters to res students, 20% is res, so I think there should be a proper representation of each so it's really fair and democratic.

Zack: I just want to say to the dons, I know you're meant to be apolitical, but you are also Vic college students, so I want you to share your thoughts, so please do raise them.

Student: In terms of voter turnout, do we know if people voting are res or commuter?

Samantha Parks: There's no way of knowing.

Ash: I very much agree there is a barrier of communication between res and commuters and I think the Board of Directors would be great. My issue was that there's not enough res representation at VUSAC. So how many reps from residence would there be on VUSAC and what would the role of the building presidents now be? How would we be integrating res council and VUSAC?

Zack: I think those are all questions that are up for grabs. In terms of numbers, everything would be proportional to population sizes. So since res student population is 20%, then on the director body res students would constitute 20% of that. We need to think about what is the federalized dynamic between building councils and VUSAC. So we can look back and see why everything is so spread out and individual. So the question isn't so much should be bring new positions to VUSAC, but what we should do to bridge these groups.

Student: Since so many positions go unopposed, I find that it's sort of redundant because people just run because it's easy. Also, I think you might attract more people by having an open group where people can come on their own if they want to be represented, instead of having elections because it could happen again where they'll go unopposed.

Zack: Ok, this is the political scientist in me speaking now. The act of doing politics is a community-building exercise in itself. So the important part is the fact that we're building a community by reaching out to one another. It's not just a question of is it more work or is it a land-grab, but it's like how would the introduction of new positions and new interactions form a community.

Steven: I'd like to address two points: The idea of an uninvolved student. I am a relatively uninvolved first-year student. I come here not so much in interest of Vic, but in interest of politics. In my opinion, these issues are not just communication, but also in terms of framework. I've been confused as hell since I've been here at Vic of all these different groups and I have no idea who people are and what they do. I'm actually interested in politics and I don't understand, so I can't imagine what this must be like for someone who's not interested. Adding this next layer of student government isn't necessarily the right answer in my opinion. If anything, I think it's going to make the issue worse. So I would propose a simpler system. There is a need for an executive, but if we were to expand the MAL role to be more accessible and represent the student to the Vic government.

Zack: Just to sort of challenge that, why is it right now that students don't already go to MALs for that purpose?

Steven: I don't know who my representative is.

Zack: Right, you don't have one. That's the problem.

Steven: Well, if we had a Board of Directors, what would be the point of having VUSAC? Couldn't we just modify VUSAC positions to turn them into representatives? Under the current system, we have leadership, but we don't have representation.

Zack: The commissioners all have the specific portfolios, and the judiciary we try to keep things running, and the MALs just help in different tasks. So essentially you don't have these representative structures. So, point well taken, I hope you continue to participate in these discussions. You're the only first year up here speaking, so congratulations.

Brianna: I was a MAL last year and it was an interesting experience because you don't even know what your job as a MAL is. But is there any way we could reform the MAL

system and amalgamate that into a Board of Directors? Also, Trin has a lot of open meetings where whoever shows up gets a vote; could we kind of take some ideas from that?

Zack: To the first question, yes that's an option, that's the point of this discussion. To answer the Trin question, is that they elect very few positions, and then all of their meetings are direct democracy. It works for them, but I don't really know how you would introduce that to VUSAC, as VUSAC is right now.

David: The big limit I find with the board is that the timeline is different, but I think this new board should function on the VUSAC timeline. Representation of students is mandated in the Vic University act, so it would take a provincial law change. Also, the point about turnout, we get a higher voter turnout in the spring elections.

Zack: I would in general be resistant to changing the commissioners because they work quite well, so I don't know if we'd want to tamper with their programming portfolios.

Student: If you do a Board of Directors, what's the purpose of MALs? Also, I think there's a danger that VUSAC is looking to be all things to all people, which I think you guys are already doing a good job, so I don't see why you need to be doing everything. It sounds like this board is meant to be a responsible government and the problem is you don't know your rep. But I don't think this is a model that would be effective to integrate Vic students into the Vic community.

Zack: We're not trying to be all things to all people, but we are the central student government at Vic College, and right now it's lacking in contributions to other communities in Vic. Also, the only position on VUSAC that you can't hold successively is president.

Lucinda: Speaking to Zack's insistence on systemic change and our efficiency, and timelines. An obstacle we overlook is that student governments have a different lifespan than other governments we're comparing ourselves to; like the provincial governments. Maybe it is that we're only accountable for so long and we imagine we can save our battles for the next year's people. So maybe an option is that we could extend our terms to two years.

Student: I feel like the biggest barrier to people getting involved at Vic has to do with the divide between res and commuter students and that starts from first year. I think there's a huge problem where the commuters don't get enough voice; it's so much easier for res students to get involved.

Kate: I'm a MAL this year and I feel a little disconnected with the student body. No one knows who I am and I want to reach out to them, so I think more of a specific representation would be a great idea. Also, I think a lot of our efficiency problems are that we already have too many roles, so bringing in another board is just going to add to that. Also, there's VOCA, which is weird because they're like another form of representation so I think it gets really confusing.

Katrina: I'd like to address the rendering of VOCA obsolete because I think something VOCA does very well is outreach, and VUSAC could learn something from that. I know a lot of commuter students who are present on Vic campus can name at least one member of VOCA who they talk to, so I think it's great. The VOCA events are very well attended and they have the commuter dons which are a very valuable resource. And I think a little more focus on getting people out there and interacting with the community is more important.

Katrina moves to mandate that VUSAC set up an Open Meeting to further discuss the Board of Directors/Student Representation before the end of January. Brianna seconds. 48 in favor. 2 abstain. Motion passes.

Angela: There seems to be this question of people's terms made longer. Well, that would take away people's opportunities to take over these roles. Also, senate is about awards and scholarships, and VCC is about academic stuff.

Student: The whole minimization is a good idea and having general positions. People are more inclined to vote for more general, outreach positions. And I agree with the extended term because you can actually get to know people. Also, supply and demand; if you have fewer positions and they do more things, then people will be more inclined to vote and get involved with these positions.

Zack: Everyone who wants to be part of this discussion, please see me before you leave.

– Voting Reform – Zack Medow

The current voting system is called “first past the post”. It doesn't matter how many people run; whoever gets the most votes wins. Obviously this is bad because you can pretty much win with less than 50% of the vote. We are looking to switch VUSAC to “ranked balloting instant runoff voting” or, as we'll be calling it, the alternative vote. [Gives explanation on chalkboard.]

– Discussion

Jade: How does this work if there's only one candidate?

Zack: If there are only one or two candidates, then it'll work in the same way as our current system does.

Jade: So to clarify, this change in the system would only be relevant for 3 or more candidates.

Zack: Precisely. Principally, this guards against strategic voting.

Alan: The spoil option online should still be available though.

Katrina: Out of curiosity, this would be primarily used in the MAL elections because there hasn't really been multiple candidates in most of the executive elections.

Zack: This system would also, though, get rid of pressures to not run.

Samantha Parks: If I could talk about the logistics of our system for a minute, I am the CRO; an assessor member to VUSAC. In terms of logistics, our current system that we use doesn't have support for this rank system. They said they're looking into it, but so far they're not really considering it, especially not in time for the next election. But also, for the MALs, you're already voting for more than one person, so this system actually wouldn't be as useful in an election where you can vote for multiple people on the same ballot. Also, if U of T is just generally not willing to do it, I wonder if VUSAC would be interested in looking at other systems or making our own system, but we need access to certain student information.

Jade: Is there any concerns that not using voting.utoronto.ca would shed a negative light of us to Governing Council or would it create a weird dynamic?

Samantha: There's nothing in the electoral policy that says we have to use that system. It's a good system because it's logistically a lot easier for the CRO to set up the ballot when they don't need access to student info, but there's nothing that says we have to use voting.utoronto.ca.

Jelena: Just to give you an overview of what's happening with the rest of student societies, we realized how hypocritical it was that we're asking UTSU to use a voting system that we ourselves aren't actually using. Pretty sure the Engineers are engineering their own system. So we're all kind of looking at implementing a different form of voting because there are concerns with the current type of voting system.

Samantha: A lot of student societies are looking into this reform, so it's probably better to advocate to utoronto to change their system. Even the current utoronto system, it's a relatively new system and it is definitely open for change, so it's probably better to just change the system we have than get a new system.

Ben: The one the UTSU uses, which the University thinks is ok, it costs about \$1000 to do one election with it, but it has more security features and you get the university to input the student IDs and you don't need the CRO to have access to it at all. But to my understanding voting.utoronto.ca is free.

Zack: I'd like to take a straw poll to approve of using this ranked voting system. It's just sort of to feel the room out.

Student: Would this be for all elections, or can we say use it for commissioners but not for MALs?

Zack: To my understanding, there are different ways of doing elections where multiple candidates are chosen from a ballot. So right now, we're just saying for judiciary and commissioner elections. It's more like should we investigate the use of this other system, not necessarily using it or anything yet.

Straw poll for VUSAC investigating alternative voting. 38 in favor. 1 opposed. 4 abstaining. David moves to make the straw poll binding, thus mandating VUSAC to look into alternative voting. Student seconds. 31 in favor. 8 abstaining. Motion passes.

Christian motions to adjourn the Annual General Meeting. Komal seconds. 33 in favor. 1 abstaining.

Meeting is adjourned.