VUSAC 2018 FALL ELECTIONS

CRO Report

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Contents

Preface

This is the CRO report for Victoria University Student Administrative Council (VUSAC)'s 2018 fall elections. Per the Elections and Referenda Code (ERC) it will be sent to all members of VUSAC, all candidates in the election, and all members of the Elections and Appeals Committee. This report will double as a transition report for my successor.

I would like to begin the report by offering a lot of different 'thank you's to a lot of different people. First and foremost to every single candidate who ran in elections this year. We had a wide array of people, all part of the Victoria College community and it was incredibly exciting. Additionally, all candidates treated me and the elections process with the utmost kindness and respect.

Second, the entirety of VUSAC for being extremely supportive. This would not have gone nearly as smoothly without such a wonderful council.

Third, all of my friends external to VUSAC who were out there promoting elections on Facebook, talking up elections at information sessions, and helping me put up many posters.

Fourth, Max, Zach, and Kevin in the Cat's Eye for hosting our Town Hall – it went incredibly smoothly and wouldn't have done so without your technical expertise and kindness!

Fifth, Christina Alcena, the Campus Life Coordinator, who was game to help in any and all ways and was absolutely essential to the residence postering and take down.

And finally, everyone who voted and participated! Seeing how crowded Town Hall was made me almost tear up – it was really nice to see Victoria College participate in these elections!

Pre-Nomination Period

Hiring and Transition

I was hired at the beginning of May 2018. One of the ideas discussed in my interview was working with the President, Jayde Jones, to create a formalized set of election procedures s the constitution makes frequent reference to an election code that, for all intents and purposes, does not exist.

I met informally with Jayde and Nickolas Shyshkin, the Vice President Internal, to discuss ideas for developing an election code prior to the fall elections. We would later have an official two-on-one, as well as I met with my predecessor, Stephanie Xu, to facilitate a proper transition.

Much of my transition was focused more around the formalization of elections policy than the conduct of fall elections. This worked because we knew we would be fundamentally changing many rules.

Recommendations

- Read past CRO reports, I read the past 3 years of CRO reports which I found to be extremely helpful because all three years had a lot of variety in terms of function and turn out.
- Be sure to read through the VUSAC Constitution, Council Policies, and Elections and Referenda Code.

Elections and Referenda Code

Much of my work over the summer focused on the creation of the Elections and Referenda Code (ERC). We met approximately six times over the course of a month. Those who participated in meetings changed based on availability, but the total number of people involved were 10. The full proposal version of the ERC will be included as an appendix which includes the committee's make up, process, and reasoning behind each change.

The ERC was passed by council, with a few minor changes, at the end of July in time for the creation of the nomination package. Having codified election rules made the process a lot easier in terms of knowing exactly what had to be done and when. Most material prior to the creation of the ERC was designed for candidates, and while that's important this document is a nice way for CRO's to have a definition of the job. I was lucky to have a very smooth transition by my predecessor, but had I only relied on the constitution and previous nomination packages I would have been quite lost.

At this time I also issued a survey to the VCU to explore voter turnout and what people liked about elections, the results are included as an appendix here. But these definitely served as guiding principles in the creation of the ERC.

Recommendations

- Work out what changes to the ERC you would like to change and propose them by the end of July at the latest to make sure they are ratified in time for elections.
  - It would probably be worth talking to your current exec/council and seeing what they felt did and did not work. This is useful as a majority of council will have ran in elections at some point.
- While the survey turnout was not high it is useful to get outside, anonymous voices from the voters. I don't think there would be any harm in issuing this survey regularly to see how the VCU engaged with previous elections.

Preparing for Nominations

Per the request of Jayde, the election dates were set mid-July, this was prior to the policy that the election dates for the year be set by the end of July. I worked with Jayde and the VUSAC Chair, Alexa Breininger, to ensure that there were no VUSAC meetings during the campaign period, but there was still a meeting that interested candidates could run in, as well we were lucky to time the announcement of results with a meeting so that we could welcome our councillors right away.

After the ERC was passed I wrote the nominations package. The creation was a combination of the previous fall election's nomination package, the ERC, and the constitution. It was sent to the VUSAC Executive on July 27th, along with the dates for the Spring election. It took approximately three weeks to get full feedback from the executive, but it was key to hammering out language and rule redundancy.

Beyond the nominations package, my August was quite busy: I hired Vibhuti Kacholia, the VUSAC Equity Co-Chair, as my Assistant CRO; I contacted the Commuter Commissioner, Emilia De Fabriitis, to ensure that, as per previous years, VOCA would be supplying dinner, I did so in time for the budget meeting; I also requested a small budget to continue the tradition of doing a gift card giveaway for voters; I contacted all neutral parties to remind them of their neutrality and promote elections; registered with the voting website; and I worked with the VUSAC Communications Coordinator, Rehan Vishwanhath, to work on our advertising campaign.

Additionally we collected the emails of those interested in more elections information twice: once at Open Vic in June which welcomed lots of incoming students and again during the Dinner with VUSAC event at Orientation Week. I sent emails to those interested on September 5th to tell them that nominations were open and highlight my information sessions.

The Elections and Appeals Committee (EAC) was formed at the end of August. It was selected, as per the ERC, by Jayde and Nick with assistance of VUSAC. The EAC was made up of six students and the CLC. I emailed them the package at the end of August for approval and only heard from two of the students and the CLC. While this is the first year with the current EAC make-up, it seems common that student members are hesitant to give feedback. The EAC will remain the same, barring any compromising of neutrality, for the Spring elections.

- Having an ACRO during fall elections was necessary for me because I was not in Toronto until after nominations had opened, but even after I was back it was useful to have someone who had run as a councillor before. That said hire early and internally!
- We started promoting about a week in advance, this seemed like a relatively good way to avoid fatigue. That said, particularly with spring elections, it's good to publicize the actual dates well in advance to avoid double booking

Nomination Period

Promotion and All Candidates

There were three big ways we encouraged people to run: social media, at orientation week, and in information sessions. Social media is important for returning students who already follow the VUSAC Facebook or know members of council, it's also a good way to share in lots of Victoria College groups.

Orientation week was the best source of promotion I felt, it helped that this year four of the Orientation executives were also members of VUSAC (all of whom had run for councillor positions at some point in their time at U of T), because it meant there were always people there who knew about VUSAC and the elections process. As well during the Dinner with VUSAC and Levies event we managed to collect over seventy emails of interested first years. A majority of our first-year nominees were people who had signed up for more information during Orientation Week.

Per the ERC I also held two information sessions, as well as advertising my office hours, during the second week of nominations. These were not particularly well attended, each averaging maybe three people, but what was good was during both info sessions we had at least one person start filling out their nomination form, as well as collecting signatures. Because the nomination package is so thorough, and because the All Candidates Meeting is mandatory, I think information sessions are never going to draw a big crowd.

The All Candidates Meeting (ACM) went well, there was a small issue of the nominations package still having the time and place as TBD, which led to a little bit of miscommunication. Otherwise it went well, it was a comprehensive overview of all of the rules in the package, a few examples, and a Q&A throughout. It was a Friday night so we did still try to keep it light and brief.

Recommendations

- This year we decided that VUSAC was able to sign nomination packages and that worked really well. Almost every single candidate had at least one member of VUSAC sign their nomination form. It was decided that this was not to happen within the office, or other neutral spaces, as well as that, as CRO, I would not be a signature. But what was good about this was it meant we could start the nomination process right away.

- Try to get members of VUSAC to spread the word on their social medias as much as possible!
- Publicize the ACM date early, be diligent in sending out the reminder email.
- I sent out the slides I used in the ACM, as well as an example poster and candidate statement (from when Jayde ran for councillor) – I think in the fall this is useful because many of the first years had not seen what a typical councillor campaign looks like. The slides were good because it meant that people didn't have to take notes.

Reopening Nominations for Upper Year Councillor

The 2017-2018 VUSAC passed an amendment separating the councillor position into Upper Year Councillors and First Year Councillors. The position was the same in terms of role and responsibility, but it allowed first years to campaign with the understanding that their goals and knowledge of VUSAC are different than someone who has been at Victoria College for a year or more. The amendment also limited the number of First Year Councillor's to three (previously there had been eight councillors and two slots were reserved for first years, but more than two could win if they got enough votes. It was rare a first year got more votes than upper years running).

This summer, VUSAC passed an amendment so that all councillor elections had to be contested or nominations were to reopen. This meant we needed four first year candidates to be contested and six upper year candidates to be contested. At the end of the nominations period we had five upper year councillor candidates – meaning that we were one short of being contested. Despite this there were eight first year councillor candidates. Meaning that there would have been enough total councillor candidates to form a full council.

As a result, I worked with the executive to reopen nominations for a two-day period, we delayed all upper year campaigning, and the elections otherwise continued. We had two more upper year councillor candidates, a second ACM was held, and we were lucky to avoid having to change any dates. Ultimately, due to two upper years dropping out of the race, our elections were still not contested – but we did not have to reopen as this happened post-ACM.

Recommendations

- While I think it was useful to have first years campaign separately from upper years, because the questions are different and it is important to acknowledge that much of first year is spent learning about Vic and it's institutions, the cap on first years did not work. Ultimately, it felt both unfair and undemocratic that first years had to compete for fewer spots when, circumstantially, upper year councillors were uncontested. All councillor candidates should have an equal opportunity of being elected.
- I would recommend that the differentiation between first year and upper year councillor be removed, instead going back to having one councillor with a number being reserved for first years. Instead I would have it in the ERC that the CRO must organize Town Hall and the election forum in such a way that first years are not asked the same questions as upper years. But they still sit on the same ballot. I feel this would stay true to the spirit of recognizing the difference between first year priorities and upper year priorities, but does

not limit the number of first years able to be elected. I spoke to many candidates who found this intimidating.

- Prepare for a nomination re-opening Plan B as you set the dates, we were lucky we did not have to move Town Hall because it had already been arranged with the Cat's Eye and heavily advertised.
- Make sure you promote to upper and first years, part of the issue we faced in not engaging with enough upper years.

Campaigning

Postering

Inspired by the decision last year to organize the CLC opening residences for candidates to poster in, the ERC mandates that VUSAC will place candidate posters in residence for them. The intent being to make elections more accessible to commuter students who may not know people on residence. Candidates from last year said the issue with the poster walk around was a combination of issues with timing and the nature of having to poster with competitors (it is of note that the spring elections are always tense, regardless of CRO and candidate pool).

Generally speaking, this worked quite well but it was also probably the most time-consuming part of being CRO. We offered two opportunities for candidates, which proved to be necessary as it was the only time for upper year councillors to submit posters. Following Town Hall, VUSAC took down posters in all the residences, as well as other Vic spaces.

The main issue with postering was a lack of availability on the part of VUSAC. This I think can be attributed to two things: a failure to stress the need for all of VUSAC to show up; and a failure to consult on the availability of council members during the times I picked. As a result on the first day it was only myself, another member of VUSAC, the CLC, and a friend of mine doing me a favour. This resulted in it taking over two and a half hours to poster on the first day.

The other thing we did differently was allow candidates to print for free in the office. This worked great! We allowed candidates thirty-five posters, free of charge, with the caveat that they have the council member on office hours stamp a ticket I had made prior to the ACM. We found this was the best way to alleviate campaigning costs as almost all campaign costs incurred were related to printing. The only concern with this is that it does alleviate some of the neutrality in the office, it is important to discourage candidates from discussing their campaigns in the office.

Recommendations

- Make a when2meet or Doodle for availability of VUSAC when setting postering times.
- Try to get as many candidates to email their posters ahead of time as possible, signing my hand is time consuming.
- Set times so that you can be in the office leading up to postering as I had a lot of candidates coming into to ask questions or have me sign posters.

Social Media

This election cycle we had candidates create Facebook pages instead of using their personal Facebook pages. I felt this generally worked, nearly every non-VCC candidate made a Facebook page, which were publicized by VUSAC. In addition to the page, candidates were allowed to change their profile pictures and share their page once.

This definitely caused the most confusion among candidates, as a majority of penalties were related to Facebook posts. Additionally, I think there was less engagement than normal, as members of the VCU were less exposed to constant campaign posts. I would not be surprised if this change impacted voter turnout.

In addition to this I created a new Facebook forum and created rules around asking questions (including creating a limit and only allowing VCU members to post questions). I think this kept the forum a much more positive place, which was one of my main goals as CRO. We also created a mechanism for dismissing questions, however, the only questions that unasked were joke questions submitted by the same person (please note, I did message him to dismiss the questions nonetheless, I'm nothing if not a stickler for policy).

Recommendations

- Advertise the Facebook pages more widely
- Ensure all council members like every single campaign page, and ideally engage with each candidate the same amount on social media (ie. everyone gets a reply to a forum answer or no one does). A big issue I felt was unconscious favouring of candidates by council.
- Next time I will still have candidates tag the CRO Facebook in posts, particularly endorsement posts. I did not think it would be necessary but I recognize it will actually make life easier in future elections.

Town Hall

My favourite part of the election cycle! This year we held it in the Cat's Eye which worked really well, it made the event seem a little less formal than when it takes place in a lecture hall. Additionally, we were able to set up mics which meant the live stream audio quality was considerably better. As well, we had a fantastic staff there to help with set up and tech. The Cat's Eye was selected upon recommendation of my predecessor. It also helped turnout because it's a space that people would be in and out of anyway, this year we seemed to have around eighty people show up, which is generally agreed upon to be unprecedented (it was particularly exciting to see students who are not "typically" involved at Vic, so those who are not on VUSAC or part of a levy).

Per tradition, VOCA generously catered, there was falafel and hummus from Ali Baba's which was very popular as well as entirely vegan. This also alleviated a lot of pressure from me, as the food is a big reason for turnout but the week of elections is already a lot of work for the CRO.

I also tried something very strange as this year's Town Hall had live entertainment at the beginning. Thomas Trimble and Leo Morgenstern very kindly sang a weird song and played a weird game as we waited to get set up. While I don't think the performance itself was essential to Town Hall going well, it did set the tone of being a fun evening. My only goal with Town Hall was to keep the energy high and the intensity low, and I believe this was accomplished.

We set up an anonymous question google form this year as it had been highly requested in the past. It was not particularly well used but we did have two question submissions.

We allowed for fifteen minutes of questions per position, in addition to the one minute speeches, which resulted in the entire evening being about two hours. Because VUSAC attendance is mandatory clean up was easy and we had council take down all campaign materials.

I am really thankful for all of the support I had at Town Hall!

Recommendations

- Try to encourage non-VUSAC students to ask questions as best as possible.
- A lot of the high turnout was candidates telling their friends about the event, try to encourage this.
- Having first year candidates go first worked because it meant they did not have to follow some of the more challenging questions asked of other positions.
- Let candidates eat dinner first!

Voting Period

Promotion

This year voting was entirely online, as opposed to having in person poll booths, as past years have had. As such I focused advertising more on social media. I do believe I could have made a larger effort in this regard. That said there were still reminders daily, and there were posts in the Victoria College Facebook groups.

Additionally, there was a gift card giveaway, as per the past few elections. It was not well participated in, I think because the previous year voters had been allowed to comment a screenshot of their voting screen, whereas, as originally designed, we asked voters to share their screenshot on their Facebook feed. The idea being that this would draw attention to the elections. The only issue with this is that not everyone's privacy settings allow for their posts to be seen, some people did raise issue with that. Nonetheless, there were five successful gift card winners.

Recommendations

- Promote heavily, in all Facebook groups and pages. I also reached out to levy heads and Dons on the last day of voting, I would recommend doing so sooner to see if they can spread the word through their channels.

Appendix: Election Dates

September 3rd – 14th: Nomination Period

September 14th: All Candidates Meeting

September 15th – 21st: Campaign Period

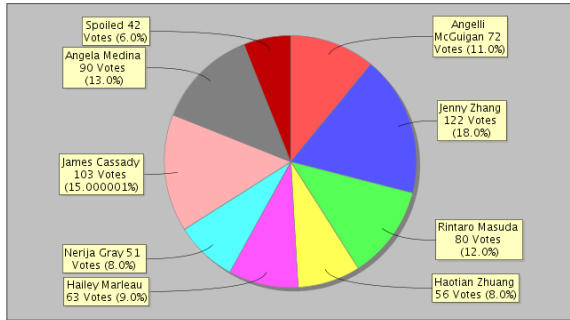September 21st: Town Hall

September 22nd – 25th: Voting

September 26th – 27th: Appeals Period

September 28th: Results Announced

Appendix: Official Results

First Year Councillor

- Spoiled 42 Votes (6.0%)
- Angela Medina 90 Votes (13.0%)
- James Cassady 103 Votes (15.000001%)
- Nerija Gray 51 Votes (8.0%)
- Hailey Marleau 63 Votes (9.0%)
- Angelli McGuigan 72 Votes (11.0%)
- Jenny Zhang 122 Votes (18.0%)
- Rintaro Masuda 80 Votes (12.0%)
- Haotian Zhuang 56 Votes (8.0%)

● Angelli McGuigan 72 Votes (11.0%) ● Jenny Zhang 122 Votes (18.0%) ● Rintaro Masuda 80 Votes (12.0%)
● Haotian Zhuang 56 Votes (8.0%) ● Hailey Marleau 63 Votes (9.0%) ● Nerija Gray 51 Votes (8.0%)
● James Cassady 103 Votes (15.000001%) ● Angela Medina 90 Votes (13.0%) ● Spoiled 42 Votes (6.0%)

Mental Wellness Commissioner

- Spoiled 24 Votes (8.0%)
- Brett Weegar 79 Votes (26.0%)
- Ali Kehl 202 Votes (66.0%)
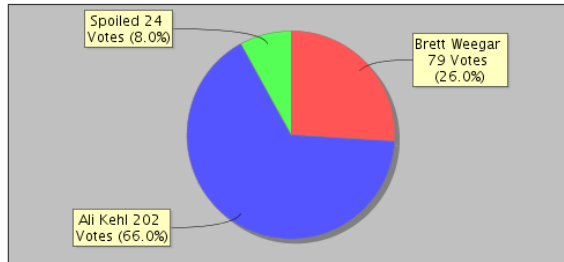
● Brett Weegar 79 Votes (26.0%) ● Ali Kehl 202 Votes (66.0%)
● Spoiled 24 Votes (8.0%)

Upper Year Councillor
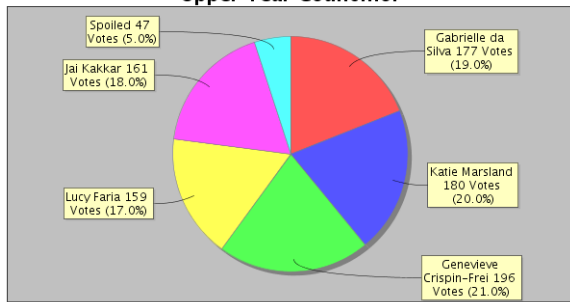
- Spoiled 47 Votes (5.0%)
- Jai Kakkar 161 Votes (18.0%)
- Lucy Faria 159 Votes (17.0%)
- Gabrielle da Silva 177 Votes (19.0%)
- Katie Marsland 180 Votes (20.0%)
- Genevieve Crispin-Frei 196 Votes (21.0%)

● Gabrielle da Silva 177 Votes (19.0%) ● Katie Marsland 180 Votes (20.0%)
● Genevieve Crispin-Frei 196 Votes (21.0%) ● Lucy Faria 159 Votes (17.0%)
● Jai Kakkar 161 Votes (18.0%) ● Spoiled 47 Votes (5.0%)

Victoria College Council
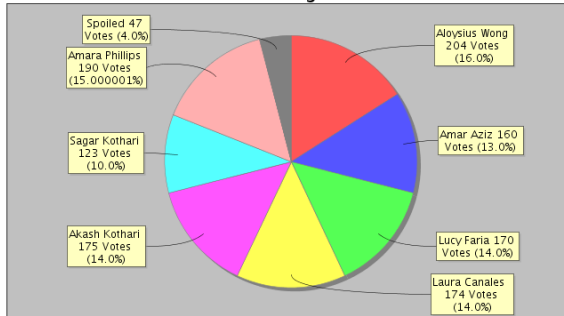
- Spoiled 47 Votes (4.0%)
- Amara Phillips 190 Votes (15.000001%)
- Sagar Kothari 123 Votes (10.0%)
- Akash Kothari 175 Votes (14.0%)
- Aloysius Wong 204 Votes (16.0%)
- Amar Aziz 160 Votes (13.0%)
- Lucy Faria 170 Votes (14.0%)
- Laura Canales 174 Votes (14.0%)

● Aloysius Wong 204 Votes (16.0%) ● Amar Aziz 160 Votes (13.0%) ● Lucy Faria 170 Votes (14.0%)
● Laura Canales 174 Votes (14.0%) ● Akash Kothari 175 Votes (14.0%) ● Sagar Kothari 123 Votes (10.0%)
● Amara Phillips 190 Votes (15.000001%) ● Spoiled 47 Votes (4.0%)

Appendix: EAC Membership

Christina Alcena, Campus Life Coordinator
Madeleine Reyno, Commuter Student
Grace Chong, Commuter Student
Simran Bal, Residence Student
Yvonne Chen, Residence Student
Nisheet Karthikeyan, Non-Vic Student (Trinity College)
Jessica Grecco, Non-Vic Student (Trinity College)

Appendix: Summary of Penalties

1. Warning: use of cover photo on personal Facebook
2. Strike: placing a poster in a residence, rather than VUSAC postering for them.
3. Disqualification: failure to attend the All Candidates Meeting
4. Strike: Misplacement of posters
5. Strike: Placing more than five posters in the Goldring Student Centre
6. Strike: Campaigning on personal Facebook page

All candidates were given the appeals form upon being issued the penalty.