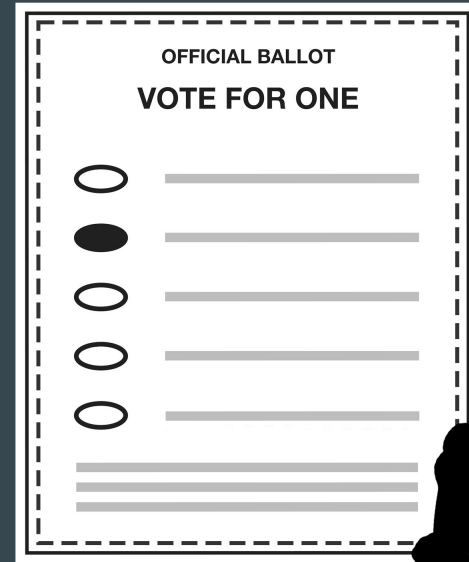# Elections and Referenda 101

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February 24 2025
GSA Council Meeting
Zain Patel (ur fav Speaker)
Sophie Shi (ur fav CRO)

Outline of presentation

- Overview of Elections and Referenda

- Who is involved in GSA Elections?

- Running in the GSA Elections

- How referenda work?

- Complaints

- Elections Results

Elections and Referenda

Overview of E&R

- Every year, the GSA holds an election for the upcoming year's executive (DEOs)
  - President, Vice Presidents (4), and Councillors at Large (10)
  - All graduate students are eligible to run in the election and to vote
- Last year, we established a new position of Associate VP Labour
  - Academically employed graduate students are eligible to run and vote
  - The list is received from FGSR/GPS at the beginning of the election period
- Sometimes, there are also referenda
  - e.g., UPass, GSA Health & Dental, external groups such as CJSR

What is a referendum?

- GSA Referenda take place in years when graduate students are asked to vote on key issues by "askers" who are either GSA members or external groups
- Past referenda have resulted in the implementation and/or continuation of graduate student services such as:
  - GSA Health and Dental Plan
  - Graduate Student Assistance Plan (GSAP)
  - U-Pass Program
  - GSA Dedicated Fee (which enables graduate students to support the on-campus radio station, CJSR)

People involved

- GSA Elections Coordinator and GSA Management
- Chief Returning Officer (CRO) and Deputy Returning Officer (DRO)
  - Oversees the General Election, Election of the Associate Vice-President Labour, by-elections, and referenda with advice from ERC
  - Monitors campaign activities and disciplines candidates
  - Approves timelines, advertises nominations, approves nomination forms, etc.
- Elections and Referenda Committee (ERC)
  - Make recommendations to the CRO on elections and referenda
  - Assist in planning election events, offer advice during elections

How Do Referenda Work?

Steps for a Referenda

1) Approach the CRO with your question (usually August/September)

2) Work with the CRO to formulate your proposal/question

3) CRO invites you to bring your proposal to the GSA Board (usually October)

4) GSA Board invites you to bring your proposal to Council (usually November)

5) Council votes to decide whether the proposal is good to be on the ballot

6) Graduate Students vote on the referenda during the general election

Running in the Election

● ● ●

Positions you can run for

- GSA President (30-40 hours per week)
  - Compensation: $40 000 + reimbursement for UPass, Health & Dental, tuition
- GSA Vice Presidents, including Associate VP Labour (20-30 hours per week)
  - Compensation: $30 000 + reimbursement for UPass, Health & Dental, tuition
- GSA Councillor at Large
  - No compensation
- Referenda candidate: support any referendum as a yes or no
  - Same Bylaw and Policy apply as a President/VP/CAL role
  - Same rules also apply to "campaign volunteers"

What do Candidates need to do?

- Submit their nomination form on time
  - Signatures of support from peers, obtain supervisor approval (if applicable) etc.

- Attend the All-Candidates Meeting, hosted by the CRO
  - Learn about the roles their running for, elections rules, and other important info

- Attend the Forum, hosted by the Speaker and CRO
  - Answer questions prepared by the CRO/ERC, and questions from the public

- Campaign for votes!
  - Make sure to follow the rules outlined in bylaws / CRO directives

What do I need to know as a councillor?

- Be informed about each candidate and their platforms

- Encourage your constituents to vote

- Attend election-related events such as the forum

- Report any violations to the CRO/DRO

Complaints

...

How to make a complaint?

Scenario :
You witness a rule being broken, such as improper postering or slating

Solution A - Informal Resolution

The goal of informal resolution is to arrive at countermeasures agreed upon by all parties (I.POL.11.1.b)

Solution B - Formal Complaint

If the CRO, DRO or Acting DRO are unable to resolve the discerned breach through informal resolution, or deems informal resolution to be inappropriate, they may, as per GSA Bylaw and Policy, Section D.POL.12.1.b, discipline the candidate(s) by imposing the penalties or remedial actions noted in GSA Bylaw and Policy, (I.POL.11.1.c)

Process for a Formal Complaint

1) **Filing a Complaint**   (I.POL.11.3.B)

    a)   Email the CRO describing the alleged breach

    b)   Explain the breach, cite relevant bylaws, provide evidence

2) **CRO Decision Process**   (I.POL.11.3.C, I.POL.11.3.D, I.POL.11.4)

    a)   If the complaint has no merit, it can be dismissed by the CRO

    b)   The CRO reaches out to the party who committed the alleged breach. They have 8 hours to provide a written response.

    c)   The CRO consults ERC and deliberates on a penalty, and provides a final decision within 72 hours

3) **Penalties** (I.POL.11.4.C)

    a)   Verbal or written warnings, demerit points, disqualification

Process for a Formal Complaint

1) **Appeals** (I.POL.11.6)

    a)   All parties are notified of the CRO decision

    b)   All parties have 24 hours to file an appeal with the Appeals and Complaints Board if they disagree with the CRO decision

    c)   ACB investigates and handles the appeal independently

    d)   ACB may uphold the decision, increase the penalty or decrease the penalty

2) **When can you complain?**

    a)   During the campaign period

    b)   Up to 24 hours after the release of provisional results

Demerit System

- If a candidate is found to have broken a rule, they may receive a certain amount of demerit points. Upon receiving 10 points, the candidate will be disqualified.

Number of points	Violation
1 - 2	**Mild infraction** ● Posters put up in unapproved location(s) ● Failure to remove physical posters within 6 hours of provisional results being announced
3 - 4	**Minor infraction** ● Early campaigning (before the end of the ACM) ● Campaigning with unapproved material ● Usage of GSA or UofA logos on campaign material
5 - 7	**Moderate infraction** ● Failure to attend the elections forum without adequate excuse ● Harassing voters, student groups, GSA officers and staff etc. ● Failure to report campaign expenses on time and/or exceeding the campaign spending limit ● Using a moderated forum (definition was reviewed at ACM) ● Campaigning in unapproved locations (ex. lab spaces, office spaces)
8 - 10	**Severe infraction** ● Failure to attend the ACM without adequate excuse* ● Illegal content or actions, property damage etc. ● Slander, libel, racism, discrimination or *ad hominem* attacks of individuals, groups, candidates, etc. * automatic disqualification without opportunity to appeal (I.POL.9.2)

Elections Results

How are Results reported? (I.POL.13)

- Upon completion of the ballot count, the Chief Returning Officer (CRO) will announce provisional results (I.POL.13.1)

- If there are no outstanding/unresolved complaints and/or no complaints are received within 24 hours of this, the official results can be released.

- The CRO will then provide a report to council summarizing the election results and report on any complaints and appeals to Council.

Bylaw of the Day!!!

Way back when...

I.POL.11.5   In the event of a tied vote, the Chief Returning Officer will draw a name from a hat in the presence of two (2) neutral witnesses, and the name drawn from a hat will be the candidate that is eliminated.

Now...

I.POL.12.5.c   In the event of a tied vote, the CRO will extend the voting period by one (1) day for the number of tied positions. The successful candidates which won by plurality of votes shall be secured. The runoff vote, for the tied candidates, shall be conducted no later than two (2) days after issuing of the results indicating a tie.

Thanks for listening! Any questions?