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# GSA Election Policy

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## Policy Statement and Objective

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The following document outlines the election guidelines of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) of the University of Calgary and aims to improve transparency in the election process. This document is designed to provide information about the electoral process to all Members of the Association. It outlines how the Chief Returning Officer (CRO) and Candidates should act during an election.

It is the responsibility of all Candidates and other interested parties to ensure that they are aware of and adhere to this policy. They are encouraged to direct any questions or concerns relating to this policy, the bylaws of the Association that concern elections, or any other issue arising from the election process to the CRO.

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## Definitions

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**Definitions herein shall have the same meaning as in the Association's bylaws. Should there be a discrepancy between this policy and the Association's bylaws, the Association's bylaws shall prevail.**

**"All-Candidates Meeting"** means a meeting scheduled by the CRO that is mandatory for all Candidates or Designates to attend.

**"All-Candidates Forum"** means a moderated forum in which Candidates address specific questions as posed by the moderator and/or Members at a predetermined time and place as identified by the CRO.

**"Association"** means The Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary

**"Banners"** means multiple individual Posters hung together or near each other, where each subsequent Poster is a continuation of the previous. Posters hung together or near each other,

each individually containing a complete message independent of other Posters, are not considered a Banner. Any Poster over 11”x17” will also be considered a Banner.

**“Chief Returning Officer”** (CRO) as defined in the Bylaws.

**“Campaign Materials”** means Banners, Posters, Handbills, AV materials, related social media content (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.), and any other Electronic Campaign Materials.

**“Candidate”** means any person running for an elected position.

**“Deputy Returning Officer”** (DRO) is an Active Member whose role is to assist the CRO.

**“Designate”** means any Active Member designated by the Candidate and has been registered with the CRO to act on the behalf of the Candidate in all matters related to the Election.

**“Electronic Campaign Materials”** means online voting materials, websites, blogs, and other social media services such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, other forms of text-messaging, or more broadly, activities such as blind phone calling, and any material made accessible by the Candidates on the internet or other communication service or device (such as cell/smart phones, computers, tablets, etc.).

**“Handbill”** means any material meant to be distributed to electors and not posted.

**“Member”** means a Graduate Student of the University of Calgary, including the Academically Employed Graduate Students.

**“None”** refers to the candidate-type option representing the decision to not select any of the Candidates and leave the position vacant as described in Section 7.

**“Poster”** means a printed advertisement 11” x 17” or smaller.

**“PSLA”** means Post Secondary Learning Act

**“Slate”** means a group of Candidates who run for elected office on a similar or singular platform for mutual advantage.

**“Staff Member”** means all persons employed by the Association in a paid capacity, whether full-time, part-time, term certain, or contract.

**“Third Party”** means individuals or organizations including but not limited to Department Graduate Associations, University Faculties/Departments, other campus-based groups, or external organizations.

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#### Applicability

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This document applies to all Members and Staff of the Association.

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## Non-Compliance

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This document contains procedures that carry significant liability for the Association as it relates to the electoral process. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action up to and including disqualification.

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## Roles and Responsibilities

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The CRO is accountable to the Elected Council for the proper conduct of the electoral process.

Candidates must adhere to this document in its entirety. The CRO oversees the electoral process and ensures its compliance with this document.

DRO(s) may be employed to assist the CRO with any provision herein.

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## Contacts

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Contact	Email address
CRO	cro.gsa@ucalgary.ca
Executive Director	gsaed@ucalgary.ca
General Enquiries	askgsa@ucalgary.ca

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## Policies

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### 1. Eligibility

- 1.1. All Members are eligible to run for office in an election subject to the provisions and limitations specified in the Association bylaws, the PSLA, and herein.
- 1.2. Staff who is also active member must take leave of absence before becoming a candidate.
- 1.3. Members seeking to run in the general election must be available to attend, or send a Designate to, the All-Candidates Meeting and the All-Candidates Forum as scheduled by the CRO. Candidates should inform the CRO of their Designate a minimum of 24

hours prior to the event.

- 1.1.1. During the All-Candidates Meeting, all terms and conditions will be discussed in detail.
- 1.1.2. All nominees will sign a form acknowledging that they understand all the terms and conditions identified herein to formalize their candidacy.

## **2. Notice of Election**

- 2.1. The CRO is responsible for ensuring that the Association's Elections Policy is posted in advance of the official announcement of the General Election.
- 2.2. The CRO is responsible for officially announcing all Association elections to Members. The announcement of an election shall include:
  - 2.2.1. Titles and descriptions of positions to be elected;
  - 2.2.2. The nomination procedure and eligibility criteria for each position;
  - 2.2.3. Voter eligibility criteria associated to each position;
  - 2.2.4. All pertinent timelines;
  - 2.2.5. Dates and times of any All-Candidates Forums and election events;
  - 2.2.6. Identified point contact(s) for elections-related inquiries.
- 2.3. The announcement of the General Election should not be made on a date such that it forces the nominations period to close without reasonable time to appeal a candidacy decision before a weekend or term break.

## **3. Nomination Process**

- 3.1. Members seeking to become a Candidate for an elected position in the General Election must be nominated and supported by five (5) other Members eligible to vote for that position;
  - 3.1.1. Elected Council members and/or GSA Staff who are also Members must not be nominators for any nominations.
- 3.2. At the time of the announcement of the General Election, the CRO is responsible for publishing a Nomination form to be completed by Members seeking an elected position. The Nomination form will include at least the following:
  - 3.2.1. Contact information for the nominee;
  - 3.2.2. The name of the position being sought;

- 3.2.3. Sufficient information identifying and confirming eligibility of the nominee for the position being sought;
  - 3.2.4. Sufficient information to identify, contact, and confirm voting eligibility of five (5) Members who support the nomination, and who are eligible to vote for the position sought.
- 3.3. Members become Candidates in the General Election upon receiving confirmation from the CRO of their successful nomination:
  - 3.3.1. A nomination is deemed successful after all eligibility criteria are met as identified on the Nomination form, and verified by the CRO;
  - 3.3.2. The CRO must provide a response to the prospective Candidate within two (2) business days of the member submitting their nomination form. Any nominee determined to be ineligible will be provided with a written explanation via email and given one business day, or until the end of the nomination period, whichever is later, to rectify any deficiencies in the nomination form.
  - 3.3.3. Official Candidates will be listed on the Association's website once the CRO verifies the nomination.
- 3.4. Should the CRO or a member of the Election Committee decide to run for an elected position, they must resign from their current position at least fourteen (14) days prior to the first day of the nomination period. Notice must be provided, in writing, to the President and the CRO.
  - 3.4.1. Neither the CRO, nor a member of the Elections Committee, are eligible to be nominated for an elected position once the nomination period has started.

#### **4. Candidate Conduct**

- 4.1. No Candidate shall run or be a member of a Slate, share expenses for campaign materials, or use similar or identical slogans.
- 4.2. The Association places a high priority on open lines of communication between Candidates and electors. Candidates, or their Designate, are required to attend all All-Candidates Forums as announced by the CRO in the election announcement. If neither the Candidate nor a Designate attend the forum, the CRO reserves the right to disqualify the Candidate, except in extenuating circumstances.
- 4.3. A candidate must sign and submit the code of conduct policy before they begin campaigning.
- 4.4. If a Candidate is unable to attend a forum, their Designate may play a 2-minute video of the Candidate at the forum or present a speech, and answer questions on the Candidate's behalf.

- 4.4.1. Candidates are permitted to use their own University of Calgary email address for campaign purposes.
- 4.4.2. A candidate may only speak to a class of students in the University for the purposes of campaigning with prior written approval from the instructor and notice to the CRO.
- 4.4.3. Candidates shall not campaign in their capacity as a student leader in any position they may hold on campus, including, but not limited to, teaching assistant, research assistant, committee chair, DGA chair, consortium chair.
- 4.4.4. During officially organized events by the Association, Candidates must behave in a manner consistent with the Association's Code of Conduct policy;
- 4.4.5. Current Elected Council Members seeking re-election shall not use any Association resources to promote their candidacy.
- 4.5. Candidates are not responsible for enforcing election bylaws or policies.
- 4.6. Candidates must obey applicable university policies, municipal, provincial, and/or federal law/regulation about the use of resources and the conduct of election campaigns.

## **5. Campaign**

- 5.1. All campaign and communication material must be approved by the CRO. These materials include but are not limited to Posters, Banners, Handbills, electronic campaign materials, and electronic communication. All campaign and communication materials must be provided to the CRO, in writing, and receive CRO approval before distribution.
  - 5.1.1. A copy of the campaign material and/or communication message must be emailed to the CRO identifying when, where, and how the material/communication will be disseminated.
  - 5.1.2. A Candidate may post campaign material through their personal social media accounts or other personal online platforms.
  - 5.1.3. Campaign material shall only be approved if it only contains statements about a Candidate's own campaign and platform.
  - 5.1.4. A Candidate may campaign in social media groups either closed or public if they have the written permission to do so from the administrator or owner of the account or group in which they wish to post.
  - 5.1.5. A Candidate may respond to comments on their previously approved posts without requiring additional approvals from the CRO.

- 5.2. All Candidates shall create a campaign platform (maximum 2 pages) which will be posted on the Association's website after the nomination period by the CRO. The CRO will provide examples of platform from previous years. The platform must be submitted by the time established by the CRO and communicated during the election announcement.
- 5.3. A Candidate may provide one photo and a platform summary with a maximum of fifty (50) words to the Association for election promotion purposes.
- 5.4. Campaign materials must not contain misinformation, slander, inappropriate endorsements, or inappropriate or discriminatory content that violates the University of Calgary or GSA code of conduct.
- 5.5. A Candidate must not misrepresent themselves in the campaign and/or on campaign materials. All campaign materials shall include, in a legible form, the name of the Candidate and the position being sought.
- 5.6. All campaign materials shall, where applicable, include in legible form, a statement declaring who paid to produce the campaign material. If campaign materials are paid for by the Association under Article 6.4 herein, such material must include the statement "paid for by the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary" on said materials.
- 5.7. A Candidate shall not make any reference to the identity of another Candidate either directly or indirectly on any campaign materials.
- 5.8. A Candidate shall not contact any other Candidate to review their platforms, ideas, campaign materials, etc., prior to the campaign period.
- 5.9. Candidates shall not use the logos of the Graduate Students' Association or the University of Calgary on any campaign material.
- 5.10. Candidates shall respect copyright law and avoid plagiarism in all campaign materials
- 5.11. A Candidate may have no more than two (2) Banners.
- 5.12. All Candidates shall:
  - 5.12.1. Comply with all building and safety regulations;
  - 5.12.2. Follow university regulations on posters, use of university grounds, and comply with all "no campaign" zones;
  - 5.12.3. Not use stickers, decals, or any adhesive material of a permanent or semi-permanent nature. If unsure if a material is permitted confirm with the facilities manager or department;
  - 5.12.4. Not campaign or post any campaign materials in any campus library;

- 5.12.5. Not campaign in the GSA office, the Last Defence Lounge, Graduate Residence, That Grad Space, The Black Lounge, or The Den.
- 5.12.6. No Candidate shall accept in-kind donation of advertising space in any publication, advertisement space, or media venue.
- 5.13. Only the Association, Candidates, and Designates may post election-related or campaign materials as approved in advance by the CRO.
- 5.14. All Candidates are solely responsible for the removal of all their campaign materials within 48 hours following the end of the election period.

## **6. Election Spending**

- 6.1. No Candidate may spend more than \$150 (CAD) during their campaign, regardless of funding source. All election expenses must be reported to the CRO in the form of receipts. Expenses must include all items considered campaign materials, the rental or use of facilities, and all items or services of any kind donated to a campaign, which must be assessed and reported at fair market value.
- 6.2. Each Candidate must submit a report to the CRO listing all expenses, including any resources received at no cost, by the end of the campaign period and before voting commences. If expenses are incurred that may be reimbursed, Candidates must submit original receipts.
- 6.3. If the CRO deems any expense not to be commensurate with the campaign or with fair market value, the CRO reserves the right to investigate the expenses before granting their certification.
- 6.4. The Association will reimburse election expenses for each Candidate in the amount of up to \$150 (CAD) after a submission of all receipts (as specified above) if requested to do so.
- 6.5. No campaign expenses may be incurred before notification of Candidate status is announced or after the end of the campaign period.

## **7. Voting**

- 7.1. Voting will take place over two (2) uninterrupted days (48 hours) through an online voting platform.
- 7.2. Members may each cast one vote per position they are eligible to vote for during the election.
- 7.3. For each position to be elected, a pseudo-candidate “None” shall be added to the ballot to indicate a rejection of the other candidates. During vote tabulation, votes for “None” shall be counted in the same manner as for any other candidate.

- 7.4. If a position requires multiple people to be elected, such as for the Officer at Large position, and there are an equal number or fewer candidates, then each candidate shall be voted for separately as if it were a separate position.
- 7.5. If there is only a single candidate for a position, then voting shall be as above using the “None” pseudo-candidate, or equivalently a clear accept/reject question may be used.
- 7.6. If there are multiple candidates for a position, votes will be counted using the Single Transferable Vote method.<sup>1</sup>
  - 7.6.1. Voters rank voting options in order of preference, from their first preference to their last preference.
  - 7.6.2. The quota to determine if a candidate is elected is calculated before tabulation begins using the Droop quota.
  - 7.6.3. Ranked ballots are counted as follows:
    - 7.6.3.1. On the first round of counting, each option shall receive a first preference vote for each vote indicating it as first preference.
    - 7.6.3.2. Should an option meet the quota of first preference votes after any round, it shall be declared elected. If there are several options meeting the quota the one with the most votes shall be elected. If there is a tie one of those options shall be elected by random draw. Multiple options are never elected simultaneously.
    - 7.6.3.3. If no option is elected or further winners are required, then the option with the fewest number of first preference votes shall be eliminated from the question. Should there be a tie for the fewest number of first preference votes, then among these, the option with the fewest number of second preference votes shall be eliminated. Should a tie persist, the procedure shall continue with third preference votes, et cetera. Should a tie still persist, an option shall be eliminated by random draw. Multiple options are never eliminated simultaneously.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://help.simplyvoting.com/docs/preferential-voting-methods>

- 7.6.3.4. When an option is eliminated, all first preference votes for that option shall be replaced by the vote's first preferred option that is not yet elected or eliminated. All second preference votes for that option shall be replaced by the vote's next preferred option that is not yet elected or eliminated, and so on.
- 7.6.3.5. If the preference of "None" is declared elected, counting stops and any remaining positions to be filled are declared vacant and proceed to a by-election.
- 7.6.3.6. This procedure of eliminating options(s) and redistributing first preference votes shall continue until all winners are elected or the number of options left equals the number of winners (this may occur due to exhausted ballots), and those options shall be declared elected.

## **8. Announcement of Election Results**

- 8.1. After the end of the voting period, the ballots shall be counted or confirmed by the CRO (not a Staff Member, not a Candidate or their Designate, and not a nominator of a Candidate).
  - 8.1.1. If physical ballots are used, the ballot count may be witnessed by one (1) scrutineer appointed by each Candidate (which may be the Candidate themselves).
  - 8.1.2. If an electronic ballot is used, a scrutineer appointed by each Candidate (which may be the Candidate themselves) may review the voting data after the preliminary results are announced.
- 8.2. The Candidate satisfying the voting criteria per Article 7 (Voting) herein will be declared the winner for their position.
  - 8.2.1. If no Candidate is declared a winner due to election of the None option or disqualification of all Candidates, then the position will be declared vacant and the vote will go to a by-election.
  - 8.2.2. In the event of a tie the position will remain vacant and a by-election will occur
- 8.3. The CRO shall announce the initial results as soon as possible at the end of the voting period, with the goal of it occurring within 24 hours. Until the election results are certified, the positions will be designated (Name of Position) Elect.

- 8.4. The initial results will be provisional until any outstanding policy violations by Candidates or others are resolved, campaign expenses are confirmed, and any other issue that may arise is appropriately dealt with. Once these issues have been addressed, the CRO shall then officially certify the results.
- 8.5. The CRO may take up to 2 weeks to certify the results of the election should an appeal take place. The CRO will sign a certification document and the official results will be announced on the GSA website.

## **9. Neutrality**

- 9.1. Members of the Elected Council must announce a time slot for when they will be available to provide potential Candidates with honest information about the Association positions.
- 9.2. In the case of new positions any Council member or the Executive Director may provide potential Candidates with honest information about the Association positions.
- 9.3. Current Elected Council members may not use their position or influence to campaign on the behalf of another Candidate.
- 9.4. All members of the Elected Council and GSA staff must remain neutral in all matters pertaining to the election process.
- 9.5. Current members of the Elected Council may run in the election and campaign only for themselves without breaching neutrality.

## **10. Complaints, Infractions, and Penalties**

- 10.1. Any Active Member who believes that any Campaign Materials violate Association bylaws, this policy, University policy, or any other election procedure, should contact the CRO.
- 10.2. Complaints must be submitted by email to the CRO.
- 10.3. Upon receipt of a complaint, the CRO shall provide an initial response to the Complainant within 48 hours. During the voting period the CRO shall provide an initial response to the Complainant within 24 hours. The CRO will investigate further if necessary and provide a written notice to both parties involved indicating the final decision which may include a warning or sanction. All complaints must include:
  - 10.3.1. Full name of the complainant
  - 10.3.2. Full name of the Candidate and any others involved.
  - 10.3.3. A description of the perceived violation including a reference to the section of the GSA Election Policy or Bylaw that has been violated

10.3.4. Any additional evidence such as emails, photos, screenshots, etc. may be dropped off in person or emailed to the CRO.

10.4. Any election violation including, but not limited to, policies outlined in this document will result in the Candidate being disciplined up to and including disqualification, and the warning procedures herein will come into effect.

10.4.1. The CRO reserves the right to act in a manner reflective of the severity of the alleged infraction, according to the CRO's interpretation of said infraction, up to and including disqualifying the Candidate(s). Should an infraction(s) be severe enough in the opinion of the CRO, the CRO may refuse to certify the election.

## **11. Warning Procedures**

11.1. Any Candidate who violates any provision herein that may result in an official warning or disqualification will be notified by the CRO of the alleged violation in writing to the e-mail address provided on the nomination form. The notification shall include:

11.1.1. A clear description of the violation including details of which policy was violated

11.1.2. Where and when the violation is alleged to have occurred

11.1.3. All evidence that was used by the CRO to come to their decision

11.2. Any Candidate receiving an official sanction because of a policy violation will have twenty-four (24) hours to fix the violation and notify the CRO of its resolution. If the violation is resolved and the CRO is notified within this time period, the sanction will be documented internally, but no public warning or sanction will be issued, unless:

11.2.1. The nature of the violation is such that it is repeated or cannot be rectified, the CRO will determine whether the appropriate penalty is a warning or disqualification.

11.3. All warnings, sanctions, and disqualifications may be posted on the Association's website and in the Association's office after all appeals have been exhausted. Overturned sanctions shall not be posted publicly.

11.4. The CRO work will focus on the philosophy of Education over sanction and use discretion to avoid "naming and shaming."

## **12. Appeals**

12.1. Candidates may appeal a decision made by the CRO by notifying the GSA Elected Council who will appoint a Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) who will adjudicate the matters as laid out in section 6.19.6 of the GSA Bylaws

### **13. Election Reporting**

13.1. The CRO will provide a written report to the Elected Council no later than thirty days after the election has been completed. This report will outline at minimum:

- 13.1.1. A summary of the election including:
  - 13.1.1.1. Number of eligible and ineligible nominees who ran for specific elected positions;
  - 13.1.1.2. Votes for each candidates, “no votes”, and abstentions. Abstentions should not be counted as a no vote;
  - 13.1.1.3. Number of Members who voted; and
  - 13.1.1.4. Election results.
- 13.1.2. A summary of any concerns, complaints, comments, observations, and issues that need to be addressed prior to the following year’s electoral cycle; and
- 13.1.3. Recommendations for changes to the Associations bylaws and/or election policy.