

GSA 2024 General Elections Report

Chief Returning Officer: **Amir Shani**

Executive Coordinator: **Taruneesh Sachdeva**

*Submitted to the Board of Directors of the GSA in fulfillment of Article 15.1
of the GSA Election Policy*



GRADUATE
STUDENTS'
ASSOCIATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

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Acknowledgements

We thank the candidates who ran for the elections (names in alphabetical order):

Adarsh Gopakumar Panicker (VP Academic)
Ahmed Ishmam Chowdhury (VP Finance and Services)
AHMED INZAMAM CHOWDHURY (VP Academic)
Alexandria Poppendorf (VP Academic)
Hunter Yaworski (VP External)
Jett Penner (VP Academic)
Karina Hincapie Martinez (AVP Labour)
Karla Oliveira (VP Student Life)
Kaylee MacLean (VP Finance and Services)
Mohit Sanjaybhai Kanani (VP External)
Nadia Ghazanfari (VP Student Life)
Nizamuddin Iliyaz (VP Student Life)
Saaka Sulemana Saaka (President)
Vivek Kapadiya (VP Finance and Services)

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Finally, we would like to thank the Election Committee volunteers (names in alphabetical order):

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Divine E. Ahuchogu
Jacob Amengor
Mohammad Baktier Uddin Chowdhury
Muneeb Khan

Summary and Tallies

The 2024 GSA General Election took place during February and March of 2024 to fill six roles. A total of 17 members submitted nomination forms, 14 of which were during the nomination period and deemed valid; the 14 nominees were announced as official candidates on February 16th after the end of the nomination period. Of the 14 official candidates, 2 candidates were disqualified during the campaigning period. The GSA Active Members (defined by the Election Policy and henceforth referred to as *members*) cast their votes electronically using the Simply Voting system on March 11th and 12th of 2024.

Results

1061 of 8598 eligible electors voted and the results were certified on March 18th, 2024. The certified results for each position follow.

GSA President

One candidate ran unopposed for this role. Members were given the option to vote or not to vote for the candidate.

- **Saaka Sulemana Saaka:** 762 (71.8%) of 1061 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 299 (28.2%) of 1061 votes.

GSA Vice President Academic

Three candidates sought the role. Members were given the option to vote for either or not to vote.

- **Alexandria Poppendorf:** 513 (48.4%) of 1061 votes.
- **Ahmed Inzamam Chowdhury:** 214 (20.2%) of 1061 votes.
- **Adarsh Gopakumar Panicker:** 182 (17.2%) of 1061 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 152 (14.3%) of 1061 votes.

GSA Vice President External

One candidate ran unopposed for this role. Members were given the option to vote or not to vote for the candidate.

- **Hunter Yaworski:** 768 (72.4%) of 1061 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 293 (27.6%) of 1061 votes.

GSA Vice President Student Life

Three candidates sought the role. Members were given the option to vote for either or not to vote.

- **Nadia Ghazanfari:** 403 (38.0%) of 1061 votes.
- **Kala Oliveira:** 330 (31.1%) of 1061 votes.
- **Nizamuddin Iliyaz:** 211 (19.9%) of 1061 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 117 (11.0%) of 1061 votes.

GSA Vice President Finance and Services

Three candidates sought the role. Members were given the option to vote for either or Not to Vote.

- **Kaylee MacLean:** 424 (40.0%) of 1061 votes.
- **Ahmed Ishmam Chowdhury:** 322 (30.3%) of 1061 votes.
- **Vivek Kapadiya:** 165 (15.6%) of 1061 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 150 (14.1%) of 1061 votes.

GSA Associate Vice President Labour

Only 2738 Academically Employed Graduate Students (defined by the Election Policy) were eligible to run and vote for this role. These are a subset of the total 8598 active members. 486 of the 2738 eligible electors cast their vote for this role. One candidate ran unopposed for this role. Members were given the option to vote or not to vote for the candidate.

- **Karina Hincapie Martinez:** 382 (78.6%) of 486 votes.
- **Not to Vote:** 104 (21.4%) of 486 votes.

Turnout

Voter turnout was 12.3% in total and 17.8% for the AVP Labour role. Both saw a jump from the 2023 GSA General Election turnouts which were at 5.49% and 8.01% respectively. Academically Employed Graduate Students, who are eligible to vote for the AVP Labour role as well, have a higher engagement level in the election in terms of voter turnout. Voter turnouts and participation levels also vary significantly across different academic programs as demonstrated by Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The Election Committee had access to the list of electors with each entry labeled 'Yes' or 'No' indicating whether the elector voted in the election or not. Knowing the name of a certain elector, their program and faculty are publicly accessible through the University of Calgary's address book system. Also, the GSA is granted access to that data from the University. In

our analysis, only academic programs with more than 20 voters were considered. Figure 1 shows out of the total eligible electors in each program, what percentage of them voted in the election. Anthropology and Psychology show significant turnout rates while different engineering and science programs follow with a gap. Figure 2 shows the total number of votes from each academic program with more than 20 voters. The figure reveals that despite having lower voter turnout rates, engineering schools such as Chemical and Petroleum Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Electrical Engineering have discernibly higher numbers of voters. The same is true for school of business and education programs. This can be attributed to some candidates being from these programs and focusing on campaigning to their peers. Also, the sizes of the programs in terms of the number of registered members is another factor these statistics can be attributed to.

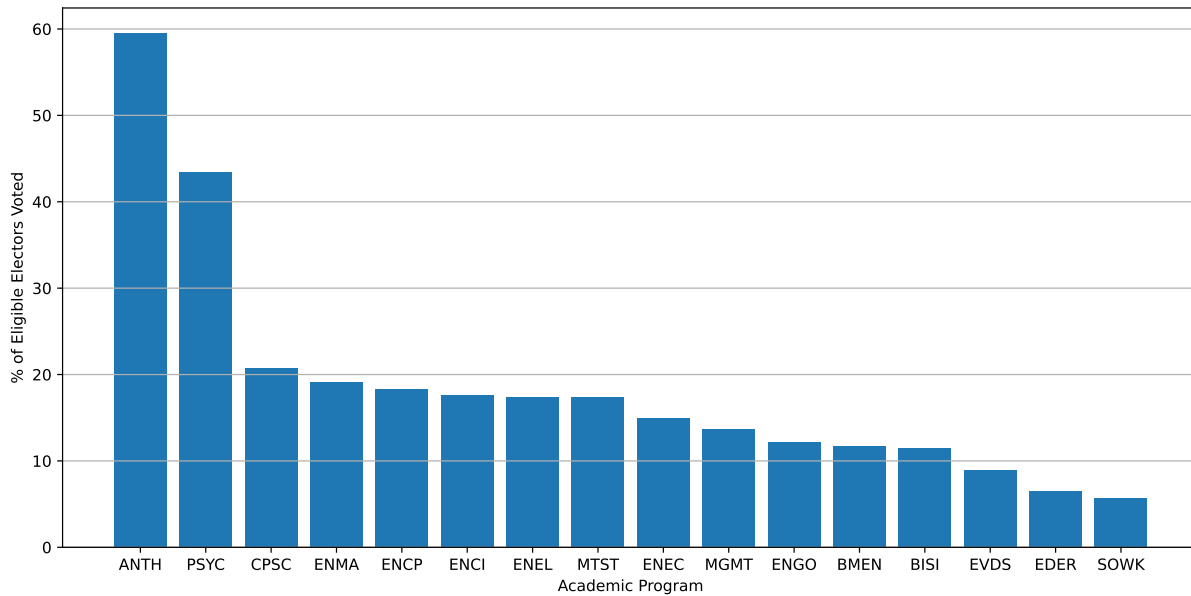


Figure 1: Turnout rates of different academic programs in percentage of the eligible electors who voted. Anthropology and Psychology have significantly high turnout rates.

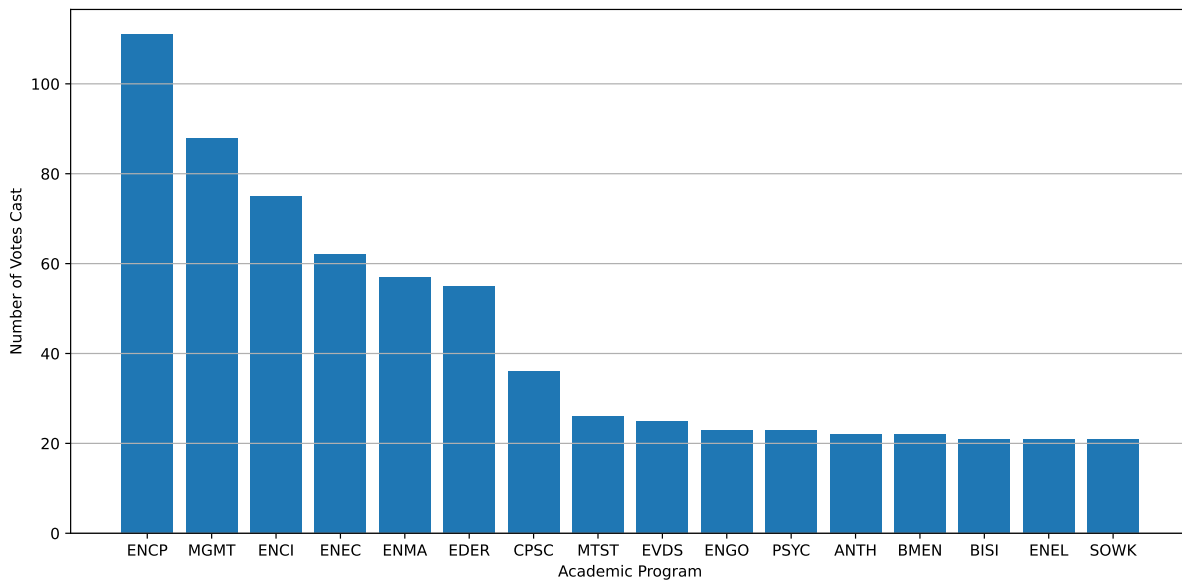


Figure 2: Total number of voters of different academic programs. Engineering schools and the school of business have higher numbers of voters.

Election Events

Multiple events were held primarily to inform the members about the elections and encourage election engagement. A feedback from last year that we applied to the 2024 election was to space out the engagement planning and election events. Starting in November, we had more time to plan and hold more diverse election events. The events are described in chronological order:

Election 101.

Nov. 7, 2023, at Last Defence Lounge

The Election 101 is a presentation, open to all members for attendance, and aims at educating the members on the election procedure and responsibilities of each role. Its target audience is all members who are interested in knowing about the elections. The attendance at this event was about 15 people. GSA Executive Director, Daniella Ikurusi, presented at this event. At the end, the CRO was introduced to those in attendance.

Election Booth.

Jan. 24, 2024, at Earth Science Building

The main purpose of an election booth is to have one-on-one conversations with graduate students, hear their opinions, answer their questions, and increase GSA's visibility on campus near elections. Many people who approach the booth might be undergraduate students. We talk to them as well and ask them to inform their TAs. As reflected in Suggested Revisions, the Earth Science Building is a great location for a booth. Coffee and some GSA swag were provided at the booth to attract students. During 3 hours we had the booth standing, we were able to talk to over 40 members about the elections and the elected roles and promote the Election 101 event which was held the same afternoon.

Election 101.

Jan. 24, 2024, at Last Defence Lounge

The materials presented at this event were similar to the previous Election 101 event. The attendance at this event was 15 people. GSA Executive Director, Daniella Ikurusi, presented at this event. In the end, some future events were promoted.

Personal Branding Workshop.

Jan. 31, 2024, at Last Defence Lounge

Held in collaboration with the Centre for Career and Personal Development of the University of Calgary, and open to all members for attendance, this workshop aimed to help the members realize how participating in the GSA General Election and possibly becoming an executive might benefit them personally and career-wise. Career Development Specialist, Charlotte Ong'ang'a, presented at the workshop. The workshop had low attendance, however, we found the presented material useful to any graduate student and very well-tailored towards the GSA Election. As mentioned in Suggested Revisions, we recommend expanding collaborations with career services.

Election Breakfast.*Feb. 6, 2024, at Last Defence Lounge*

The main focus of the Election Breakfast event is to provide the members with the opportunity to interact directly with the current GSA Board of Directors executives regarding the election. Each executive explains the responsibilities and challenges associated with their role. Members will have the chance to speak with the executives and have their questions answered by them. The attendance at this event was about 70 people.

Election Booth.*Feb. 7, 2024, at ICT Building*

The location and date of this booth were not great. The ICT table is a table on the side where people pass by without paying much attention. Also, there were no events after it that we could promote at the booth. Coffee and some GSA swag were provided at the booth. We were able to talk to some members and spread awareness about the election.

Election Booth.*Feb. 15, 2024, at Downtown Campus*

The location of the booth was okay but the engagement was very low as most students had classes and most of them were undergraduate students.

All-Candidates Meeting.*Feb. 21, 2024, at GSA Office*

The All-Candidates Meeting is held after the nomination period closes and the nominees with valid paperwork are announced as official candidates. It is mandatory for the candidates to attend. Although the 2024 All-Candidate's Meeting followed the conventional approach of iterating over the most important policies and familiarizing candidates with the rules, we have suggested some augmentations to the for future All-Candidates Meetings in Suggested Revisions. The event was held with hybrid attendance and all candidates were present, with some attending online. The GSA Chief Returning Officer, Amir Shani, presented at this meeting. The presentation took approximately 40 minutes, leaving 20 minutes for questions and answers.

All-Candidates Forum.*Feb. 27, 2024, at Last Defence Lounge*

It is an important election event where the members have the opportunity to directly hear from the candidates, ask them questions, and evaluate their platforms. The 2024 All-Candidates forum was held in person with all candidates in attendance, but one. It was facilitated by the GSA Chief Returning Officer, Amir Shani, and the GSA Executive Coordinator, Taruneesh Sachdeva. We also saw an attendance of about 20 to 30 members besides the candidates. The event took a little over 90 minutes which was inadequate and the CRO had to cut off candidates on multiple occasions due to time constraints. Suggestions for better structuring this event are provided in Suggested Revisions.

Election Booth.*Feb. 28, 2024, at Earth Science Building*

Despite the good location, we did not see much traction toward the booth. One reason was not enough volunteers were attending the booth. Also, it would be more impactful if the booth was held one or two days earlier to promote the All-Candidates Forum.

Election Booth.*Mar. 11, 2024, at Foothills Campus*

Despite the good location and high engagement last year, we did not see much traction towards the booth. A reason could be the timing of the booth and most students had classes early in the morning. We should have an election booth on campus for voting days.

Election Booth.*Mar. 12, 2024, at ICT Building*

Similar to Foothills, this booth at ICT was also not engaging. Next year, we should look for a different location.

Suggested Revisions

This is perhaps the most important section of this report. Many changes are necessary to both the structure of the elections and the policies for better elections in the future. The suggested changes are categorized and within each category mentioned in the order of importance.

Election Timeline

- **Extend the campaign period** to overlap the voting period. Candidates should be able to campaign during the voting period. There is no reason they should not and preventing them from doing so hinders election engagement. Overlapping the campaign period with the voting days also eliminates the unfair advantage gained by candidates who violate Article 5.13 of the Election Policy.
- **Allow a sufficient number of buffer days between the end of the nomination period and the All-Candidates Meeting.** This is to allow the Judicial Board to convene and recommend a course of action in case any conflicts or appeals occur during the review and validation of the nominees' paper works. The recommended date for the All-Candidates Meeting is 3 to 4 days after the end of the nomination period. Note that this does not reduce the time of the campaigning period since per Article 14.5.1 of the association bylaws, candidates are allowed to commence campaigning right after the nomination period ends and even before the All-Candidates Meeting. Needless to say, they will have to acquaint themselves with the policies and abide by them if they decide to campaign before the All-Candidates Meeting.
- **The CRO should provide feedback to nomination packages** and allow nominees sufficient time to revise and correct discrepancies with their nomination packages. This would require two deadlines for the nomination period but might result in a more graceful nomination process.

Election Policies

The following revisions and article references are based on the 2024 GSA Election Policy.

- **Introduce a graduated sanction system.** All warnings are treated uniformly according to the current policies, despite the type of violation that leads to them. Also, by the 'non-compliance' section of the policies, any two violations will result in imme-

ciate disqualification regardless of the violation severity. We propose a binary system consisting of 'hard warnings' issued against 'severe violations' and 'soft warnings' issued against 'mild violations.' This requires extensive study and re-evaluation of policies and violations which is outside the scope of this report.

- **Article 5.13 of the Election Policy** should only apply to physical campaign materials. If we extend the campaign period to include the voting period, then the single purpose of this article will be for the candidates to collect the clutter created by their campaign materials. Violations of this article will be less severe and will not result in unfair advantages. There will be no need to take down digital campaign materials and the campaign period will become less stressful.
- **Article 14.2.2 of the Bylaws and Article 7.2 of the Election Policy** are misleading about what options to include in the ballot. 'Voting No' is different than 'Not Voting,' and the members should be provided with the ternary option of (1) voting for the single candidate for the position (2) voting 'no' to the candidate (an informed decision) (3) abstaining from the vote (an uninformed decision). For positions where multiple candidates are present the only option given besides voting for the candidates is to abstain. Abstains should not be reflected in the result counts.
- **Article 4.4.7 of the Election Policy** should be more specific. Firstly, the phrase 'campaign in their capacity' is vague. Secondly, 'in any position' is too broad. Thirdly, the examples are unnecessary. We propose something along the lines of: *"Candidates shall not use resources such as office spaces, printers, and communication means like email addresses, address books, and social media accounts at their disposal and inaccessible to other candidates due to their role as a leader or a volunteer in an organization inside or outside of the GSA, for campaigning purposes."* The reason for this is to prevent unfair advantage. Also, an amendment or another article can follow like this: *"candidates shall not seek or get an endorsement from any organization inside or outside of the GSA for running as a GSA General Election candidate."* There are some important details about this amendment. If a candidate has done a good job as a leader or a volunteer in a previous role, they should be allowed to advertise it in their campaign. Also, there is no problem with the supervisor or the organization of their previous role to attest to the good job the candidate has done in their previous role. However, they should not get endorsed as prospective GSA Executives or GSA General Election candidates. This is because the candidates should try to appeal directly to the members to get votes, e.g. through election forums, instead of competing to get endorsed by different organizations and get votes through that.
- **Article 8.1.2 of the Election Policy needs more specific language.** 'Review' is too broad and candidates might feel once they are given access to the election data, they are allowed to analyze voter data in any way they like; which raises concerns about electors' data privacy and ownership. It also creates conflicts with the CRO as happened in the 2024 elections. Some candidates kept requesting more time to scrutineer the data. Of course, all requests for extensions were granted, but when asked afterwards, none of the scrutineers were able to provide valuable or legitimate insights gained from reviewing the voter data. They also refused to even mention what criteria they inspected the data by and what they were looking for. Therefore, the policies

should be very specific about what the scrutineers appointed by the candidates are allowed to inspect. In order to verify the legitimacy of the results, the candidates do not need to check anything but these three items: (1) The counts that the system shows are consistent with the counts the election team have announced. (2) The elector list is legitimate and does not violate the policies. And all eligible voters received emails containing voting directions and ballot links. (3) Election information or questions were not modified during the voting period by the election team. Based on these criteria, it is easy to establish a one-business-day window for the scrutineers to do their jobs.

- **Add an article to the Election Policy** clearly stating the order in which candidate names should appear on the ballot and that order should be indicated to the voters, preferably on the ballot itself. The best approach is a random order be shown to each voter. If any other order is chosen, e.g. alphabetical, it should be indicated on the ballot.
- **Article 5.5 of the Election Policy** can be removed. It seems like the whole purpose of the article is acknowledgement, not bookkeeping or expense tracking as those are managed by section 6 of the policies. There is no such statement on SU election posters either. Finally, it makes the campaign material design and approval unnecessarily complicated since technically everything from uploading a video on Instagram to printing posters in the public library incur costs and someone pays for them. For instance, if a candidate decides to personally pay for some materials, it would not be sensible to include a 'Paid for by me' note in their campaign materials. And the GSA does not care who paid for a candidate's campaign material as long as the expense report is submitted on time and accurately.
- **Either add a definition for "Nominee"** in the Election Policy or mention that "Nominee" and "Candidate" are used interchangeably. This led to confusion in the 2024 elections in a situation where it was not clear whether Article 14.1 would apply to a nominee whose candidacy was not yet officially approved and who was looking to appeal a decision by the CRO.
- **Article 5.11.5 should include** "washrooms" and "locker rooms" and "the GLU office" as no-campaign zones. Also, we should find ways to allow campaigning in graduate university residences with certain measurements. For example, door knocking should be disallowed but attending residence events and gatherings or putting up posters on public residence areas should be allowed. the GSA might have to correspond with the Residence Services for this matter.
- **Article 5.7 is redundant.** Although candidates must not act as a slate, there is no harm in candidates talking to each other and exchanging ideas. This article is at best unenforceable, since we really cannot prevent candidates from contacting each other and violation cases are difficult to prove, and at worst hinders safe and healthy communications between candidates.
- **Article 5.2.2 should be changed** to allow the candidates to summarize their platforms in more words. Candidate feedback indicated to us that a hundred words would be a better choice.

Election Committee

This year was the first year an Election Committee was formed. The committee consisted of five volunteers, the CRO, and the Executive Coordinator adding up to seven people in total. We had twelve applicants for the Election Committee this year. We shortlisted them to six applicants based on their resume and statements of purpose. Then those six were interviewed individually by the CRO and the Executive Coordinator to get to know them and after closer assessment of their qualifications, chose five members for the committee. To be more efficient in the future, the committee should consist of three total volunteers including the CRO. The three volunteers will be titled:

- **Chief Returning Officer:** Chairs the committee. Knows the policies inside out. Resolves the complaints and approves all committee communication and election campaign materials.
- **Deputy Returning Officer:** Selected through an interview process by the CRO. Knows the policies inside out. Helps the CRO with the complaints and campaign material approvals.
- **Vice Chair of Marketing:** Selected through an interview process by the CRO. Responsible for promoting the elections and holding the events such as the election booths and the forums. Works with the GSA's Marketing and Communications team to make sure the elections are marketed properly.

To have a more engaging committee, I suggest all three volunteers be paid an honorarium. Also, a more thorough selection process for the committee involving tasks as well as interviews might help. For example, the CRO will provide the DRO role applicants with some problems to solve requiring analysis of the policies and critical thinking. Depending on the number of applicants, a direct test on the policies could also be an option. This is to test each applicant's commitment to the role.

Election Events

- **The All-Candidates meeting** should be divided up into multiple smaller role-specific Election Forums. That way, candidates will have more time to express their opinions and present their platforms. The members will have a higher chance to attend at least one Election Forum. They will also have more freedom to choose to attend the forums for the roles they are interested in.
- **The All-Candidates meeting** should be more than just a reiteration of the policies and the rules. Either in the same meeting or in a separate one arranged by the Vice Chair of Marketing, we should encourage and facilitate the campaigning process by giving candidates advice on how to campaign more effectively. For example, just putting up posters will not be enough to catch graduate students' attention; especially since the GSA Elections usually overlap with the SU's. GSA candidates should show up at DGA events, canvas around campus, and door knock.
- **Hold workshops and talks in collaboration with the career services** such as the one that was held in collaboration with the Centre for Career Development. They

can be free for all members to attend or they can be specifically held for the candidates.

- **Election Booths** should either be in Earth Science or MacEwan Hall. We should try to have booths right before other election events to promote those events as well. Coffee and hot chocolate are great for attracting students.