

**The 2010  
General  
Election**

**Report  
Of the Chief  
Returning  
Officer**

**Hans Rollmann**

Chief Returning Officer

**Brian Chang**

Deputy Returning Officer



**GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION**  
LOCAL 84 - CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

## Nomination Process

The 2010 York University Graduate Students' Association (GSA) executive elections began with the opening of nominations on Monday, March 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 at 10.00am. Nominations closed on Friday, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2010 at 4.00pm. The nomination process was advertized through the following means:

- Electronic – emails were sent to the Council list for distribution to GSA units; emails were sent over the GSANEWS distribution list; a notification was placed on the YUGSA website; notification was sent to all members of the GSA Facebook group
- Posters – posters were produced and posted in prominent locations around campus

Nomination forms were available for pick-up at the GSA office and by request electronically from the Chief Returning Officer.

The positions publicized were:

- **President**
- **Vice-President Campaigns**
- **Vice-President Finance and Services**
- **Vice-President Equity and Community Relations**
- **Vice-President Gender**
- **Vice-President Internal**
- **Chair of Management Board**
- **Student Senator**

After the close of nominations, the following positions were acclaimed:

- **President** – Phil Steinersen
- **Vice-President Campaigns** – Tanya McFadyen
- **Vice-President Equity and Community Relations** – Navindra Baldeo
- **Vice-President Gender** – Beth Washburn
- **Vice-President Internal** – Cassandra Ashton
- **Chair of Management Board** – Anne Stebbins

The positions of Vice-President Finance and Services and Student Senator remained vacant at the close of nominations. Nominations were therefore extended until Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> at

4:00pm. The extended nomination period was advertized through the identical methods outlined above. After the close of the extended nomination period, both positions were contested by two candidates each:

**Vice-President Finance and Services:**

Aurora Barsalou  
Jeanette Cepin

**Student Senator:**

Shahnaaz Alidina  
Shannon Snow

## Accessibility

Full efforts were taken to ensure maximum accessibility at every stage of the election process. Materials were produced in large print and electronic format. The polling station was situated in a fully accessible location, and large print and Braille ballots were available. Posters were also placed at accessible heights and areas for the widest possible audience.

A meeting was held with the Access Centre during the nomination period to discuss accessibility options and considerations. It was hoped the Access Centre would be able to assist in briefing both candidates and poll clerks on accessibility concerns as they did last year, however the rapidly changing nature of this year's election (given vacancies, acclamations and extensions of nominations) did not allow for sufficient notice to schedule these.

The Access Centre has a growing clientele and sessions need to be scheduled in advance. Due to the extremely short period between the hiring of elections staff and the voting dates set by Council, there was very little leeway to accommodate their scheduling needs. Accessibility concerns were however highlighted by elections staff during the all-candidates meeting and the poll clerk training. In order to avoid situations like this in future, it is imperative that either GSA Council conduct hiring of the CRO considerably in advance of the voting dates, or the CRO be given greater flexibility in rescheduling voting dates as necessary.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is recommended that hiring for the CRO position be conducted, at the latest, in early January with the successful candidate to be ratified by GSA Council at its January meeting. This will not require more hours or greater pay, but will rather ensure the CRO has sufficient advance notice to begin the nomination process earlier, integrating flexibility for extended nominations if necessary. It will also enable further advance notice to advertize and promote the election process.*

## Campaigns

Campaigning began on March 10, immediately following the all-candidates' meeting. Campaigning continued until voting ended. A campaign spending limit of \$150 per candidate was established. Election dates could not be changed, as they had been established by a resolution of the GSA Council. Owing to the shortened campaign period, therefore, it was determined that an election forum/debate would not be held. This was due both to the short time period available for scheduling and advertizing such an event, the extremely short notice candidates would have had to prepare themselves for such an event and to fit it into their campaign schedules; the slim likelihood of attendance at an event featuring only two positions was also a consideration. This decision was discussed with the candidates who agreed with it.

A concern and source of complaints last year was the difficulty of ensuring candidates were adhering to spending limits in poster production. Candidates in the 2009-10 election filed allegations that other candidates were producing posters and not reporting them on their expense reports. While these allegations were dismissed due to lack of evidence, it was acknowledged this was a legitimate potential concern and one very difficult to enforce by counting posters. This year, therefore, candidates were required to submit each individual poster to the Elections Committee, which stamped or signed them as authorized. This proved somewhat labour and logistically-intensive, but ensured that the numbers of posters produced could be monitored by the Elections Committee. All candidates kept their poster production costs below the limits established by the Elections Committee. For the purposes of this election and given the smaller number of candidates running, the approval of campaign materials by the CRO and DRO was feasible.

## Voting

Voting took place on March 16, 17 and 18 from 10am-5pm each day. During the initial nomination period, the Elections Committee had intended to establish two polling stations: one outside the Grad Lounge in Ross Building, and the other at another location. Review of election reports from previous years indicate that the polling station outside the Grad Lounge has been the only one to garner any significant voter turnout. Nevertheless, it was felt that it would be worthwhile to experiment with a second location in the hopes of increasing overall turnout. However, given the fact that only two positions were contested in the end, it was determined that a second polling station would be gratuitous and that the cost of staffing it would exceed the potential benefit of an experiment which in previous years has not proven very successful. Indeed, the 2009 elections report recommended solely one polling station be established in future years. A polling station was, however, in operation at Glendon College on the afternoon of March 17. Seven polling captains were employed to staff the polling stations.

The polling station at Glendon gathered under 10 votes. Working with the Glendon College Students' Union in the future years for publicity and logistics would be beneficial.

Ballots were produced in large print as well as Braille format. Initially, the Access Centre at York had offered to produce the Braille ballots. Unfortunately, the Access Centre contacted the Elections Committee the morning voting was to start, to indicate they would not be able to provide the ballots. This necessitated a scramble to produce and procure Braille ballots. Frontier Computing at Yonge and Eglinton was hired to produce them (as they were able to ensure the quickest turnaround) and Braille ballots were available at the polling station by 14.30 on the first day of voting. For future reference, Adaptive Technology Services at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services can provide Braille ballots at a competitive price with advance notice.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is recommended that in future, unless alternate arrangements can be made to provide Braille ballots free of cost a minimum of 72 hours before the voting period, Braille ballots be procured commercially in order to ensure no delay or danger of non-availability during the voting period. Braille ballots should also be printed in regular type under the braille for poll clerks who do not read braille.*

## Results

Votes were counted immediately following the close of voting.

There were a total of 84 votes cast. 5 of these ballots had been segregated due to polling captains being unable to locate the voters on the primary voters lists. However, further review by the Elections Committee located all five voters on the list of eligible voters.

The results of the vote count were as follows:

### VP-Finance and Services:

Aurora Barsalou – 36 [winner]

Jeanette Cegin – 35

Spoiled: 12

### Student Senator:

Shahnaaz Alidina – 37

Shannon Snow – 43 [winner]

Spoiled: 3

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is recommended that the results of the 2010 GSA Elections be ratified.*

The following report reviews additional matters of significance for review by the GSA Council, pertaining to the 2010 Elections.

## Complaints and Violations

One complaint was received from Student Community Leadership Development about a poster being placed on a recently renovated portion of wall, which they requested remain off limits for postering in future. A candidate also reported the disappearance of one of her posters. Neither of these incidents were attributed to malicious intent on the part of any candidate. No complaints were filed by candidates against other candidates. The election was, on the whole, an extremely amicable and collegial process.

## Overall Recommendations

The GSA Elections Policy contains very little language on the subject of either acclamations or extended nomination periods resulting from vacancies in the initial nomination round. In the case of acclamations, wording in the GSA Policy is quite awkward and should be updated. Furthermore, there is a paucity of policy concerning acclamations. One of the initial questions raised by a contested candidate was whether acclaimed candidates were allowed to campaign on their behalf (particularly if an acclaimed 'slate' endorsed a particular candidate). Given the lack of existing policy on this matter, the Elections Committee ruled that only active candidates would be permitted to 'cross-campaign' with other candidates (acclaimed candidates, therefore, would not be permitted to actively 'cross-campaign', although they could certainly support and/or assist candidates on an individual basis).

Furthermore, there is no existing policy on extension of the nomination period (timelines, process, etc). It would be useful to develop a policy, so that future elections committees will be aware of the possible necessity of extending nominations and will have a clear process to follow which will fit in with elections timelines established by the GSA Council.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is recommended the GSA Council undertake to update Elections Policy and GSA bylaws pertaining to both acclamations as well as the nominations process.*

Considerable discussion also surrounded eligibility of voters. While the majority of graduate students are full GSA members and therefore eligible to vote, there are some graduate students who are considered "Associate Members" by virtue of agreements signed between their student associations and the GSA (these include many students at Osgoode, Schulich,

and in Environmental Studies). However, these agreements are extremely outdated, and it is no longer explicitly clear what the relationship is between these students and the GSA in terms of voting rights (as well as other areas of student life).

In 2009, Schulich students were not permitted to vote because it appeared explicitly clear from their membership agreement that voting rights were precluded. In 2009 Osgoode students were allowed to vote, but the student association representing Osgoode students was informed it would be the last election wherein they could vote, pending an updated agreement with the GSA. This year, therefore, Osgoode students were not permitted to vote.

This year, for the first time, the status of Environmental Studies students, particularly the Master of Environmental Studies students, came into question following a review of their associate agreement. In light of existing precedent, and the lack of clarity in the agreement, it was determined that for this year Environmental Studies students would be permitted to vote, with the clarity of their status to be followed up on in advance of next year's election.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is highly recommended that the GSA undertake to negotiate updated associate membership agreements with students in Osgoode, Schulich, and Environmental Studies. It is recommended this project be undertaken as a priority task, given the amount of time it will most likely take.*

Confusion over the remuneration of the DRO for the election period was caused by the absence of a clear line item on the GSA budget. In order to prevent any future issues with pay for work completed, the GSA should incorporate payment for the DRO separately in the elections budget as it does for the CRO.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *It is recommended that remuneration for the CRO and the DRO should be included as separate line items on the GSA budget.*

## Additional Notes

There were some areas where the CRO and DRO wished to provide recommendations but held strongly divergent opinions. In order to highlight these matters for reflection by the GSA Council and future elections staff, they are presented for discussion below.

### A note on acclamations

It was the strong view of the DRO that acclamations in GSA elections should be abolished in favour of a general vote of confidence. He felt that in the spirit of democracy and accountability, and because of the historical tendency of acclamations in GSA elections, all candidates should be subject to a general vote. When the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of positions available, ballots could be cast by the electorate in "favour",

"against", or "abstain" of a particular candidate. Where votes "against" or "abstain" outnumber the votes in "favour" of the candidate, the position would remain unfilled until such a time as by-election procedures can fill the position. He felt that no candidate for the GSA should be acclaimed. The implications of this recommendation would require all candidates in an election to actively seek a mandate from the electorate and allow the electorate the right to say no to the election of a candidate even if they faced no opposition. Acclamations can lead to complacency with the candidates failing to interact with the electorate, causing a lack of engagement and awareness of the elections, democracy, and the GSA.

The CRO strongly disagreed with this perspective. He felt that the function of GSA elections is twofold: to provide the membership an opportunity to engage with the GSA democratically and to help shape the direction of the GSA, but also to provide strong and accountable leadership. Requiring a vote of confidence threatens to undermine the autonomous strength of GSA leadership. Regardless of outcome, somebody has to fill the positions. In the event of a no-vote, GSA executive positions would remain unfilled and functions vital to the fulfillment of advocacy and service provision to graduate students would fall by the wayside: the negative impact on graduate students would be far greater than any positive impact gained by a symbolic vote.

Moreover, such an outcome would undermine the credibility of the GSA in its interactions with university administration and the wider community. At a time when graduate students face a significant number of threats to post-secondary education, the last thing the student movement needs is to be weakened by vacant positions. Moreover, if nobody else is interested in a position and the position must be filled, holding a confidence vote is a symbolic gesture which would consume considerable financial resources and time – resources the GSA could better apply elsewhere, given its limited budget.

Furthermore, given the traditionally low numbers of applicants for executive positions and the high turnover rate, requiring a campaign and vote regardless of the level of interest could act as a further deterrent to involvement, especially since the normatively competitive style of democratic elections is a particularly traditional model with roots in patriarchal western colonial culture, and one which does not necessarily appeal to the diversity of GSA membership.

### A note on abstentions

There was debate about the recording of votes. Currently, votes are designated as either a vote for a particular candidate, or a spoiled vote. The DRO recommended that in order to accommodate the democratic right of the electorate to abstain from choosing a candidate on a ballot if they so choose, a choice to "abstain" should be included on the ballot. The DRO also noted that the GSA is the only student government he knows of that does not allow abstentions.

The CRO disagreed with the DRO's position, noting that ultimately the purpose of voting is to select somebody to fill the office and that ultimately any function outside of that (such as symbolically indicating one's desire to not vote for either candidate) is secondary to that purpose.

Furthermore, if a greater number of voters chose "abstain" than chose either candidate, that could undermine the credibility of the winning candidate in fulfilling their duties – duties which must be fulfilled with confidence for the sake of the GSA and its entire membership. More pragmatically, this would create time-consuming debate during vote-counts as to whether particular marks on ballots counted as 'abstentions' or legitimately 'spoiled' ballots (some ballots, for instance, contained a variety of marks or words, and the intention of the voter would in some cases be difficult to discern or presume).