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From the office of the...

Operations Commissioner

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Miranda Clayton, Operations Commissioner
SUBJECT: Edits to Operating Policy 1.9.10.2 – VOCE PRESIDENTIAL, SPEAKER, & COMMISSIONER ELECTIONS
DATE: February 15, 2016

Dear Assembly,

When Ryan MacDonald and I ran for Operations Commissioner we did not have a lot of overlap in our platforms. The one thing we agreed needed all the help it could get was VP elections. The time has finally come for remodeling our process and I am proud to present the work the Operations Committee along with several other partners has completed. In order to make this easier, I have decided to format policy changes as a table.

CHANGE	REASONING
<p>Shorter time limits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VP presentations went from 20 to 12 minutes - VP pooled questioning went from 15 to 10 minutes each - Speaker presentations went from 20 to 5 minutes - Speaker individualized question period went from 10 to 5 minutes per candidate 	<p>The most concerning issue regarding VP elections is the length. The time limits outlined before worked when there were only 2 or 3 candidates but as the undergraduate student body has grown and more emphasis has been placed on outreach it is no longer unusual to see 5+ candidates for one position. The easiest solution was to impose stricter time limits.</p> <p>VP candidates normally do enough outreach prior to the election that a 20 minute presentation is excessive. It should be a brief overview to refresh everyone at that point, not an in depth look at the platform. We also cut down on pooled questions by 5 minutes per candidate in the interest of saving time as the SRA has had ample time to ask questions previously.</p> <p>We drastically cut down on presentation and question time for the Speaker because the Speaker's job is to maintain neutrality in the interest of running the assembly. They do not come in with a platform as they should not have an agenda thus 20 minutes to present was excessive. They need less question time for the same reason, there are no platform details to discuss.</p>

<p>Styling pooled questions as a debate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates have a 2 minute time limit to answer - SRA must submit questions to the Speaker in writing - The SRA shall not ask booth questions - The Speaker may amalgamate and/or remove questions at their discretion - Candidates shall not have a rebuttal period 	<p>Pooled questions will be styled as a debate in order to maintain a rigorously timed schedule. Debate style means there is no rebuttal period but candidates are free to give their opinion on what another candidate has said when it is germane to do so or in their closing statement as a final word to everyone. Again, we have imposed a 2 minute time limit for candidate responses in order to keep things relevant and have time for more questions. This is also why booth questions have been removed. Booth questions eat through time like nothing else and are unnecessary. If you are interested in individual responses to the same question it could and should be asked beforehand during outreach so you can compare candidates. If we remove booth questions it will allow time for more questions overall as we will not have to take time out for them.</p> <p>In order to keep things flowing smoothly the SRA shall submit questions to the Speaker in writing. The Speaker has the discretion to amalgamate or remove questions at their discretion but to maintain transparency we are aiming to have questions typed up and projected as they are received so the Speaker can have their notes (e.g. "this question is too similar to a question that has already been answered thus I am removing it") displayed next to them. As for question submitting, those without speaking rights can still submit questions but must get an SRA member to sign off on it and submit the question for them just like they would have to cede them rights at any other time.</p>
<p>SRA members shall not use electronic devices during individualized question period</p>	<p>This rule used to be implemented then was removed now we are aiming to implement it again. Our reasoning for this has to do with the way voting will be split. We are aiming to have presentations and pooled questions on day 1 of election, the Saturday, while individualized questions as well as closing statements and the vote will be on voting day 2, the Sunday. A serious problem we have encountered is vote whipping and some SRA members peer pressuring others into voting for who they would like to see.</p> <p>Not allowing electronic devices greatly reduces the capacity for voting pressure to happen and instead encourages SRA members to pay more attention during individualized questions and closing statements to tease out their exact vote order. SRA members have the opportunity to discuss the</p>

	<p>candidates all they want with others after voting day 1. Voting day 2 should be left for deeper introspection on the best choice for the students. This will be enforced by the SRA on the SRA, meaning call out someone using electronic devices and hold each other accountable as the Speaker has enough to do already. It's not a complete ban, your phone can be on the table in case of emergencies but should be left along while laptops and tablets are definitely discouraged.</p>
<p>Each SRA member shall sign their ballot so individual votes can be made public in the minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please note this applies to VP, Speaker, and Commissioner elections 	<p>The referendum only failed by 0.3%. It is obvious that students crave more interaction and transparency throughout the process so we are stepping up the promotions game as well as upping the level of interaction general MSU members get with the candidates. The goal is to engage MSU members and have them give their input to SRA members so they can keep it in mind when voting. This will take place in discussion, emails, social media posts, and possibly a poll on the MSU website so choices can be quantified.</p> <p>With students giving their input they deserve to know how their representatives voted to see if they actually feel represented by them. The vote will be kept secret at the meeting and still done by ballot so as to reduce pressure on representatives but the results will be published in the minutes so students can check to see who voted for who if they are interested. If SRA representatives are truly the most qualified to make the final decision on VPs they should be able to justify who they voted for whether it matched up with their constituents or not. Every other choice we make is public so Operations decided to extend that to VP, Speaker, and Commissioner elections.</p>
<p>Candidates who also hold an SRA seat must abstain from voting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please note this applies to VP, Speaker, and Commissioner elections 	<p>This is one of the recommendations put forward by the VP Ad-Hoc committee that we felt definitely needed to be put in place. When there are only 35 voting members every vote has great potential to sway the room, especially if there are many candidates to split votes. Candidates who also have an SRA seat normally vote for themselves, meaning they have an opportunity to speak for themselves where it matters most when other candidates do not.</p> <p>I firmly believe that to create an equitable playing field we need to remove the possibility of candidates who are also voting members voting other than abstain. Of course every candidate</p>

	believes they are the best for that role but that does not mean their constituents they are supposed to be speaking for do. To run and vote for yourself is usually an act of self-interest, not an act in the interest of your constituents.
Removed mention of the SRA office	We no longer have an office so I removed mention of it in the policy. Thank you to Hayley Regis for pointing this out despite the more important changes occurring and being debated upon.

Along with the changes in policy there are several changes that do not need to be mandated that way. As mentioned, there will be opportunities for MSU members to engage with their VP candidates like never before. The MSU has already booked out 1280 for a public “Meet the Candidates” sessions and everyone, SRA or not, will be encouraged to read platforms. I am also proposing we run a poll on the MSU website in conjunction with other outreach that asks two questions: 1) Which caucus are you represented by? and 2) Please rank the candidates for each position with number 1 being your top choice and so on. The reason for this is the other outreach helps assess the quality of candidates but there needs to be a way to quantify student opinion. It also ensures MSU members who did not get a chance to interact with their SRA representatives still have a way to voice their opinion. I know there are concerns about the MSU website and survey outreach but offering is better than not offering and the link is easily shareable for maximum outreach.

The overall goal I have in mind is to establish the SRA as an electoral college of sorts. Their role is to listen to public opinion through all ways possible, do the research, and vote with both of those in mind. Student voices are valid and of utmost concern but the SRA will make the final call after listening to those voices. It will be rocky at first as students become normalized to being involved in the process but they will eventually acclimatize and we can build a more engaging electoral culture out of it. The referendum failed but we all know there is room for improvement so please critically think about these changes and come prepared to voice your opinion on Sunday. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Miranda Clayton
 Operations Commissioner
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