



REPORT

From the office of the...
Elections Department

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Peter Belesiotis, CRO and Stephanie Dephoure, DRO
SUBJECT: Winter 2020 Elections and Referenda
DATE: March 30, 2020

Dear Members of the Assembly,

As per MSU Bylaw 10, we are writing to share with you the results of the 2020 MSU Presidential Election & HSR Referendum as well as those of the recently concluded 2020 SRA General Election & OPIRG Referendum.

We are pleased to report that both election cycles marked successful efforts to facilitate fair, accessible, and transparent elections and referenda on behalf of the MSU's membership.

In the following pages, you will find enclosed a list of elected representatives and winning referendum sides, a breakdown of turnout in each election/referendum, and recommendations for future efforts.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

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A. 2020 MSU Presidential Election & HSR Referendum

Results

Three nominations were submitted by eligible MSU members to run as candidates in the 2020 MSU Presidential Election. The winner of the 2020 MSU Presidential Election was Giancarlo Da-Ré. The round-by-round results are pasted below.

ROUND1		
Giancarlo Da-Ré		2504 votes
Jackson Tarlin		975 votes
Krystina Koc		665 votes
Elected Giancarlo Da-Ré due to: highest 1st preference		
ROUND2		
Giancarlo Da-Ré		Elected 2504 votes
Jackson Tarlin		975 votes
Krystina Koc		665 votes
Exhausted votes		0 votes

In the 2020 HSR Bus Pass Referendum, MSU members chose the twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. This was the current level of service in use by MSU members at the time of the referendum. The round-by-round results are pasted below.

ROUND1		
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students.		2338 votes
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) for a total of \$215.50 in year 1, \$225.36 in year 2, and \$229.62 in year 3.		1065 votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) for a total of \$194.74 in year 1, \$204.20 in year 2, and \$208.05 in year 3.		823 votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) plus expanded service as detailed above, for a total of \$203.16 in year 1, \$212.78 in year 2, and \$216.80 in year 3.		696 votes
No bus pass.		494 votes
Eliminated No bus pass. due to: lowest 1st preference		
ROUND2		
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students.		2375 (+37) votes
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) for a total of \$215.50 in year 1, \$225.36 in year 2, and \$229.62 in year 3.		1085 (+20) votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) for a total of \$194.74 in year 1, \$204.20 in year 2, and \$208.05 in year 3.		1081 (+258) votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) plus expanded service as detailed above, for a total of \$203.16 in year 1, \$212.78 in year 2, and \$216.80 in year 3.		735 (+39) votes
Exhausted votes		140 (+140) votes
Eliminated The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) plus expanded service as detailed above, for a total of \$203.16 in year 1, \$212.78 in year 2, and \$216.80 in year 3. due to: lowest 1st preference		
ROUND3		
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students.		2566 (+191) votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) for a total of \$194.74 in year 1, \$204.20 in year 2, and \$208.05 in year 3.		1568 (+487) votes
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) for a total of \$215.50 in year 1, \$225.36 in year 2, and \$229.62 in year 3.		1117 (+32) votes
Exhausted votes		165 (+25) votes
Eliminated The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) for a total of \$215.50 in year 1, \$225.36 in year 2, and \$229.62 in year 3. due to: lowest 1st preference		
ROUND4		
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students.		3270 (+704) votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) for a total of \$194.74 in year 1, \$204.20 in year 2, and \$208.05 in year 3.		1901 (+333) votes
Exhausted votes		245 (+80) votes
Elected The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students. due to: highest 1st preference		
ROUND5		
The twelve (12) month pass (September - August) plus expanded service as detailed above for a total of \$223.92 in year 1, \$233.94 in year 2, and \$238.37 in year 3. Note: This is the current level of service in use by McMaster students.		Elected 3270 votes
The eight (8) month bus pass (September - April) for a total of \$194.74 in year 1, \$204.20 in year 2, and \$208.05 in year 3.		1901 votes
Exhausted votes		245 votes

By level of study, this represented a turnout of 8.6% in Level I, 25.4% in Level II, 31.4% in Level III, 27.5% in Level IV, 40.8% in Level V, and 19.5% in Level IX (a level assigned by the Office of the Registrar to students for whom a level of study is not applicable).

Promotional Events and Strategies

Nominations Promotion - MSU Presidential Election

This year, the nomination period for the MSU Presidential Election ran from December 2nd, 2019 until January 15th, 2020 at 5pm. A standard package was ordered for the promotions and was distributed consistently throughout the nomination period on the MSU Elections Department social media pages, as well as the MSU social media pages. Nomination information (including a digital version of the nomination package) was available on the MSU Elections website for access. I tried to utilize the winter break to the best of my ability during this long nomination period by ensuring promotional material was shared consistently. In January, close to the closing of the nomination period, I worked with Connor Maclean and Adit Dixit to produce an informative video about the role of the MSU President, as well as nomination details and deadlines.

Nominations Promotion - HSR Referendum

This year, the HSR Referendum nomination was unable to run concurrently with the MSU Presidential Election period due to SRA meeting schedules. The nominations were open from January 6th-17th 2020, closing at 5pm. In the past, students have not been keen to establish campaign teams for this referendum, and this year proved to be the same. Despite this, the content was promoted consistently throughout the nomination period on the MSU Elections Department social media pages, as well as the MSU social media pages. Nomination information (including a digital version of the nomination package) was available on the MSU Elections website for access.

MSU Presidential Election General Promotions

Promotions for the MSU Presidential Election included an extended standard package, which highlighted voting dates and key events. We had individual assets developed for each key event (to be shared on the event day) and as well, had large format printing developed to showcase the voting dates, which was displayed both in the MUSC Atrium, as well as on the MUSC Windows in the MSU Office. In order to showcase this year's candidates, we offered candidates the opportunity to take a headshot with Adit after the All-Candidates Meeting. These photos were edited by Connor and were uploaded to the Presidentials page on the MSU Elections website, which included a small blurb and social media information for each candidate (if they wished to provide it).

The key events for this election all occurred within the same week, making it a particularly busy week for promotions. I reached out to Khaleel to provide assistance with this, and he was a tremendous source of support for this effort, posting all of the assets on the MSU social media channels and keeping up with the key events of the week.

The next section of the report will outline the key events of the MSU Presidential Election:

1. Candidate Meet and Greet

This year's candidate meet and greet was held on January 21st from 6-8pm in The Grind. While this event is typically held in TwelvEighty, we were unfortunately double-booked for the same night, and had to make some last-minute accommodations to ensure the event could still be held. Luckily, the staff at TwelvEighty and AvTek were very accommodating, and the event set-up was not impacted greatly by the venue change. I ordered \$500 worth of appetizers from TwelvEighty to be served throughout the event, and AvTek provided a simple microphone set up for the candidates and the MSU President, Josh, to host the event.

Despite substantial promotional efforts leading up to the event, there was a low turn-out to the meet and greet this year. Most individuals in attendance were members of a campaign team, and not many individuals stayed for the full duration of the event. While this was disappointing to see, I think it shows room for this event to be revamped in the future. Personally, I think students may not feel as engaged in the event because they are not as actively participating in the discussion - if there is a way to incorporate this next year I think it would improve this event for the better.

2. Are You Smarter Than The MSU President? - First-Year Focused Trivia Event

Around November and December of last year, I had discussions with Grace Bryson, the MSU First Year Council Coordinator and Anika Spasov, the MSU Spark Coordinator about how to encourage first-year engagement elections. Much of what we touched on in our discussions focused on how to improve knowledge translation to first-year students, who likely are engaging with elections this large for the first time. We thought that a trivia event which combined McMaster-themed trivia with some trivia on the role of the MSU President and the election would be a fun way to do this. We decided to host the event in PGCLL M12 as we felt this location was located in a residence building, was central to campus, and in close proximity to many of the residences in North Quad. The event was held from 6-8pm in order to allow students with night classes the chance to attend. Light snacks were provided, and we were donated 2 pairs of Charity Ball tickets to raffle off at the event to encourage turnout. A standard package was developed to promote the event - digital assets were distributed to the MSU Elections social media channels, and were also sent to be distributed on the MSU Spark and MSU First Year Council social media pages, which have a greater reach to the first-year student body. We also utilized First Year Council members to put up posters for the event within their respective residences.

Despite these efforts, this event saw extremely low turn-out. As a result, the charity ball tickets were not raffled off. I was disappointed to see the lack of success of this event, but again, I think it points to the need to increase excitement around these events. From my

discussions with Grace and Anika, I do believe there is a pressing need to adequately promote these elections to first-year students in particular, but the strategy towards this should be changed for next year.

3. Presidential Candidates Debate

This year, the candidate debate was held on January 23rd from 3-5pm in the MUSC Atrium. This event ran very similarly to how it has in previous years, however, this year I decided to try live-captioning services for the event as an alternative to ASL interpreters. After discussions with some of the MSU Maccess executive team members, I was advised that live-captioning would generally be accessible to a broader audience than ASL interpretation. The cost of the event went up slightly this year as a result of the technology required to display the live captioning, however, I think this change was positive overall as it allowed us to make the event accessible to a broader audience. In another effort to improve accessibility of the event, I posted a video of how to get to the event space, which was posted on the event page for the debate on Facebook for public access.

The generation of about half of the debate questions were decided upon beforehand, developed with the CRO Peter, and Michael Wooder. The rest of the questions for the debate were submitted by audience members. We utilized the help of the elections committee members to collect responses throughout the first half of the debate. These questions were collected and reviewed by myself (the DRO) for content and similar themes, and then passed to the CRO to deliver to the moderator (thanks again Josh for stepping up last minute to do this!). Overall, we had a lot of questions from the audience, which covered a wide variety of topics pertinent to students, and featured in a number of the candidate's campaigns.

Overall, the debate was successful this year. We saw a decent turnout in the atrium, and the live stream of the event saw over 1.7k views. Based on these numbers, it is evident that many students do engage with the debate, but are maybe not able to make it in person for a number of reasons. I also noticed that a number of students were commenting questions on the Facebook livestream. In the future, it would be great to be able to engage online and in-person audiences simultaneously by taking questions from both platforms. Furthermore, based on the Facebook livestream engagement, I think it would be beneficial to expand live streaming to other social media platforms, such as Instagram, to expand the viewing audience.

Promotions - Voting Period

During the voting period, I exercised a variety of promotional techniques as a best effort to improve engagement with the election. In addition to daily social media posts on all the MSU Elections social media accounts and MSU social media accounts, we tried to utilize email lists to send a reminder email to all MSU members to vote in the election.

The day before the voting period opened, students received an email listing all of the candidates for the MSU Presidential election along with their blurb and social media accounts from the MSU Elections website.

On the second day of voting, students received an email which provided them information on both the MSU Presidential Election (and candidates) as well as the HSR Referendum. The email included information on how to vote, and direct links to do so from the email.

In addition to these emails manually sent out by myself, students would also receive email blasts from SimplyVoting up until they cast their ballot in the elections they are eligible to vote in.

While I believe that these emails are generally successful in increasing voter turnout, it is important to ensure that students do not feel they are being spammed by these emails, as they do receive quite a number of them over a short period of time. Particularly difficult to balance is whether or not to send a general email blast to all students, since this will include those who have already voted. I received a number of complaints this year about receiving emails from our department even though they have already cast their ballot. If there is any way to mitigate this in the future, I think it would be something to consider.

Successes

No voting/email issues

During our FYC election, we received reports that some emails were not being delivered to McMaster email addresses – this meant that even though students could still cast their ballot, they would not receive a direct reminder with a link to do so. Working with University Technology Services and SimplyVoting, we were able to ensure that all messages from the SimplyVoting domain will be properly delivered to students who have not unsubscribed from voting reminders. During elections after FYC, we did not have any reports of voting or email issues.

Effective complaints process

This year, we encouraged all candidates/campaign teams to submit complaints as early as possible and provided loose deadlines to do so. This not only improved our workflow, but ensured candidates were informed of violations early on during the election, ensuring they would not unknowingly receive multiple complaints for breaking the same rule throughout the election, only to find out when those complaints were all submitted on the final day of campaigning. This may have been a factor in avoiding disqualifications and appeals – there were none during this election cycle.

Improved debate accessibility

This year, a live captioning interpreter was used during our Presidential Election Debate rather than an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter which has been used in the past. Live captioning allows a broader population of MSU members to engage with the debate, regardless of their familiarity with ASL.

Challenges

Low turnout

Turnout in this year's MSU Presidential Election, while within the historical range of average turnout during MSU presidential elections, marked a noticeable decrease when compared with the 2019 MSU Presidential Election. Explanations for this decrease are multifaceted and speculative. Among possible contributing factors are: fewer candidates this year compared to last and/or shifting student attitudes towards the MSU or student government broadly given that our promotions strategy was very similar to the strategy employed last year. This trend was also transferable to events, which saw an overall low turnout of students, and reduced engagement, compared to previous years.

Recommendations

Simplification of MSU Election Rules

Multiple Elections Committee members noted that the rules surrounding MSU Elections, particularly the Presidential Election, may be too arduous or complex and pose a barrier for those interested in becoming involved in elections, with the suggestion to re-evaluate the number of applicable rules for future election years.

Re-Evaluation of Presidential Events

Many of the events run during the MSU Presidential Election period have been run traditionally for many years. While events like the debate are essential to this promotional period, other events, including the meet & greet and potential first-year engagement event should be re-designed to promote greater student engagement. Our hope is that if these events can be changed utilizing feedback for this year, it will promote greater turn-out at events, which will hopefully translate into engagement with the electoral process overall.

B. 2020 SRA General Election & OPIRG Referendum

Results

SRA members for the 2020-2021 year are listed in the table below.

Caucus	Elected representatives
Arts and Science	Adeola Egbeyemi
Business	Puneet Thind, Jacob Wang, Adit Dixit, Jacob DeSilva
Engineering	Jamie Koscak, Dameli Mambetalinova, Hrithik Patel, Maynard Smid, Saad Baig, Damian Godlewski
Health Sciences	Bethel Samson, Zoe Tsai
Humanities	Haley Birch, Malik Nakua, Sarphina Chui
Kinesiology	Manpreet Chopra, Charlie Violin
Nursing	Riana Bagtasos

Science	Gail Marie Del Castillo, Simranjeet Singh, Danial Aminaei, Denver Della-Vedova, Simran Dhindsa, Armin Sariaslani, Christy Au-Yeung
Social Sciences	Matthew Jones, Amylia Mesic, Shelby Seymour, Adrian Stathoukos, Sabreina Dahab

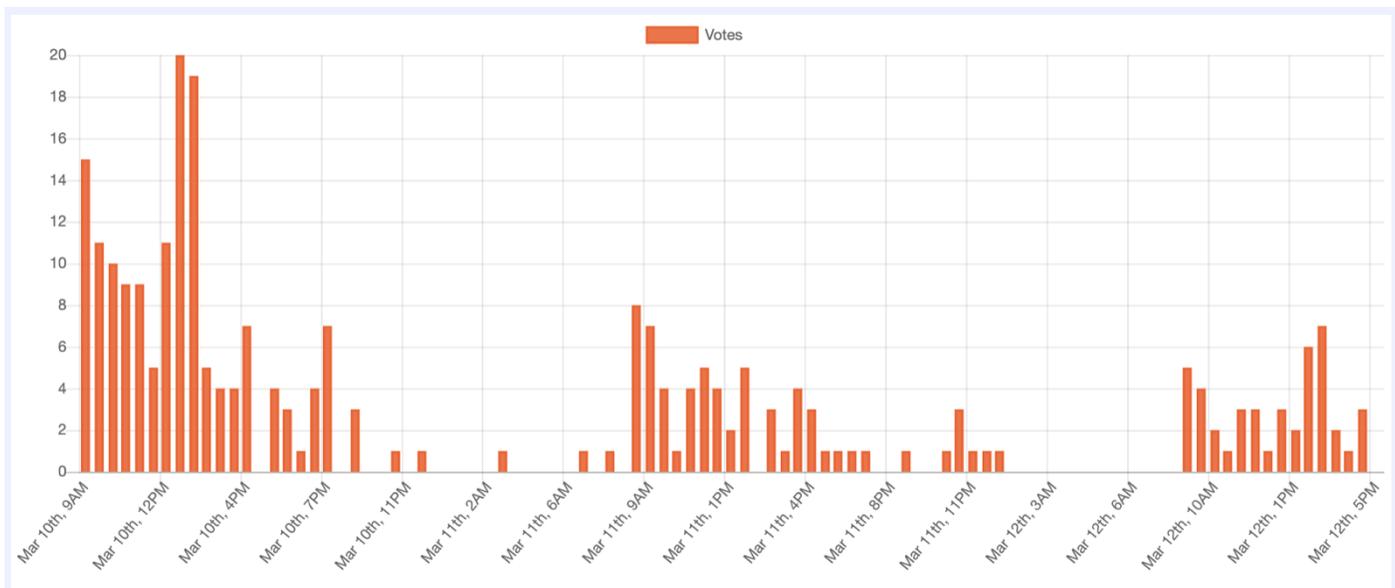
Elections were run in the Business, Engineering, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences academic divisions – all other caucuses were filled by acclamation. Round-by-round results for each election that was run can be found on the MSU Elections webpage.

In the 2020 OPIRG Referendum, students chose to continue funding OPIRG. Only one campaign team was formed (in favor of continuing to fund OPIRG).

Turnout

Turnout in the four SRA elections that were run is as follows: 262 (8.2%) of 3 212 eligible electors in Business, 387 (31.2%) of 1240 eligible electors in Health Sciences, 145 (2.4%) of 6 126 electors in Engineering, and 105 (2.6%) of 3 792 electors in Social Sciences. It is important to note that the SRA Engineering and Social Sciences elections were for a limited number of seats within each caucus (all but two Engineering and one Social Sciences seat were already filled by acclamation before the nomination deadline was extended) and took place following the suspension of regular classes as part of McMaster’s COVID-19 response – both factors that may have negatively impacted turnout.

Business:



Promotional Events and Strategies

General Promotional Strategy - Nominations

This year, the OPIRG Referendum and SRA General election periods were not able to run concurrently, but there was plenty of overlap in their nomination periods which gave us adequate time to promote both. A standard package was ordered for both the OPIRG Referendum promotional assets and SRA General Election promotional assets. Ideally these elections would be combined into a single promotional package, but the different dates for nominations made this difficult to execute. The assets for both of these promotional periods were displayed on all of the MSU Elections social media accounts and website for the duration of the nomination periods, as well as the MSU social media accounts. I also reached out to all SRA members and the Speaker to share the nomination assets on their respective faculty social media accounts and provided them multiple sizes and formats of the promotional materials at the start of the nomination period.

SRA General Election Nominations

Reflecting on the success of the SRA General Election last year in terms of the number of nominations received, I reflected on the work of last year's DRO and CRO and noticed that much of the promotional strategy featured photos and testimonials from current SRA members. In addition, a number of caucuses ran social events within their faculties to promote the election. Knowing that this strategy proved effective last year, I reached out to all SRA caucus leaders at the end of January to see if they would be interested in being involved in this year's promotional materials for the election. I offered them to submit a testimonial about their experience, or if they'd like, we could take their photos and use it to generate faculty-specific promotional materials. Unfortunately, after several attempts to reach out, I only heard back from SRA Health Sciences, Rhea and Arzoo, who offered to be part of the materials. I thought the promotional materials might look a bit biased towards a particular faculty if they were the only members from a particular caucus featured, so I decided to continue with promoting the nomination period through the assets designed by the Underground. As aforementioned, I also reached out to all SRA members and the Speaker on multiple occasions to share the nomination assets on their respective faculty and SRA social media accounts, although I cannot comment on the degree to which this was done.

I also offered to support SRA caucuses in planning small-scale engagement events within their faculties to promote the election. Again, only SRA Health Sciences reached out to plan an event for the nomination period. They held a 'SRA Elections 101' event in the Health Sciences student lounge and provided pizza and discussions on the role of the SRA and how to nominate yourself for the position. When I talked to Arzoo and Rhea they said that they had a number of students come to engage in discussion and pick up nomination packages, which is a positive outcome. I shared their event on the MSU Elections page in order to increase the audience that this promotion would reach.

Moving forward, I think that communication and sufficient engagement with current SRA members in the promotional strategy for nominations is essential in ensuring

adequate student engagement in the SRA General Election. While I was disappointed to see a lack of involvement from the majority of caucuses this year, I think this provides an opportunity to improve methods of communication in the future. Potentially email is not the best method to contact members, and instead, a platform like Facebook should be utilized for sharing information and forming a collaborative space for current members and the Elections Department to work on faculty-specific promotional strategy, events, etc. I think the SRA members provide a valuable outlook and means of engagement with their faculties, which ultimately impacts the success of the election. The elections department should make all efforts to engage them as much as possible in the future.

Unfortunately, after the first nomination period closed on March 4th, we still had vacant seats in the faculties of Engineering, Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Kinesiology. After extending the nomination period for another day (until March 5th), we were able to fill remaining seats on the Humanities, Science and Kinesiology caucuses. Nominations for SRA Social Science were extended to March 9th, and nominations for SRA Engineering were extended to March 11th - both of which resulted in an election for the remaining seats. To promote extended nomination periods, I utilized the stories feature on the MSU Election Instagram and made updated tweets and Facebook posts. Additionally, we utilized faculty-specific email lists to inform students when nominations for their faculty had been extended, and when they had been extended until. While the emails proved to be our most effective tool for promotion, many students became frustrated when receiving daily emails from us.

OPIRG Referendum Nominations

Nominations to form a team for a side of the OPIRG Referendum were promoted alongside the SRA General Election nomination assets on all MSU Elections social media platforms and MSU social media platforms. Information about the nomination process, including the updated rules and nomination package, could be found on the MSU Elections website.

SRA General Election and OPIRG Referendum Voting Period

As a result of the varying length in nomination periods for each of the caucuses in the SRA General Election, we had to adapt our promotional strategy for the voting periods to be faculty-specific. We utilized the email list to send an email which announced the opening of the voting periods for the faculty-specific SRA elections, as well as the OPIRG referendum. The email included direct links to vote, and links to the MSU website to learn more about the referendum, and to view the candidates running in the respective SRA General Elections for each faculty. This email was sent out twice during the voting period for the OPIRG Referendum and the SRA General Election for the Business and Health Sciences caucuses. In addition to this, students eligible to vote in either of the ballots received emails from SimplyVoting prompting them to vote until they had cast their ballot. Due to the changing situation surrounding COVID-19 and the suspension of many MSU operations, the election for SRA Social Sciences and SRA Engineering seats had been delayed until March 20th. Thank you to the Communications Team for designing and distributing voting period promotional assets for this election!

Successes

Effective complaints process

As during the 2020 MSU Presidential Election (noted above) we encouraged all SRA General Election candidates to submit complaints as early as possible and provided loose deadlines to do so. This may have been a factor in avoiding disqualifications during the 2020 SRA General Election.

SRA Health Sciences turnout

Turnout in the SRA Health Sciences election was high. While this faculty division often has high voter turnout, strong collaboration with this year's SRA Health Sciences caucus was certainly a contributing factor in raising the election's profile within the division. In the future, it will remain important for all SRA caucuses to engage with the Elections Department to promote MSU Elections.

Challenges

Acclamations

A large number of seats were acclaimed during this election cycle. If this trend continues in the future, it poses the risk of damaging the accepted legitimacy of MSU Elections. Reasons for the relatively low number of nominations submitted are likely complex multifaceted – we have been unable to identify any particular easily-correctable issues that would lead to increased interest in nominations.

Engagement with SRA Members

Adequate engagement from current SRA members has proven to greatly impact the success of the nomination period, and overall engagement with the election. This year, very few caucuses engaged in promotional support for the election, with only SRA Health Sciences running a promotional event.

COVID-19

Two of our elections – Engineering and Social Sciences – were delayed from their original start date as we needed to re-open nominations (MSU bylaws dictate that if less nominations are submitted than positions available, those who submitted nominations are acclaimed and remaining seats are re-opened for nominations). This pushed the election for two (of six) SRA Engineering seats and one (of five) SRA Social Science seats into the period that McMaster had suspended all in-person classes. This was a very hectic time for most students, which likely impacted candidates' ability to campaign and the ability of students to be engaged with the election.

Recommendations

Reduced Cost of Fines

Two Elections Committee members recommended that the cost of fines be lowered for future SRA General Elections, as they believe it may pose a financial barrier to running as a candidate.

Simplification of MSU Election Rules

As during the Presidential Election, some Elections Committee members noted that the number and complexity of MSU Election Rules may be a barrier that prevents students from being interested in submitting a nomination to run.

Clear Communication of Promotions Responsibility to SRA Members

In the future, it would be nice to see sufficient engagement from all caucuses in the promotion of the election – this could be better communicated as an expectation through an update of their job description, or clearly communicated during training.