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Toronto, Ontario
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Letter of Advice/Recommendations

To the Officers, Directors, and Members of Durham College Students Incorporated;

This letter is the second part of the elections report from the consultant regarding the 2018 General Elections of Durham College Students Incorporated. This letter should be viewed in conjunction with the Statement of Votes and Election Expenses (unaudited) as providing a full record regarding the 2018 General Election of Durham College Students Incorporated.

This letter outlines five (5) areas where the elections controls and processes could be improved in order to provide a better elections process.

1. Elections policy framework

The Elections policy framework is found in the Elections and Referendum Policy. The policy was passed by the transitional directors with advice from the Elections Consultant. There has been a number of issues found regarding the framework which needs to be addressed by the board before the 2019 elections.

a) Referendum Provision

There are currently no referendum provision in the Elections and Referendum Policy. A referendum provision does exist in the by-laws with a number of insistences where a referendum is required. It is the opinion of the Elections Consultant that a referendum provision needs to exist in order to allow for a fair referendum should one be called by a future board.

b) Required Signatures

The Elections Consultant received feedback from several candidates that they felt that the required number of signatures was too low and that a higher threshold should be required. It is the opinion of the Elections Consultant that the number of signatures required for executive and director candidates is low and may not provide effective ballot access control.

c) Election of the executive

There appears to be some who would advocate a system where the executive is appointed either by the board or by the AGM. I do not have any opinion on this method of election, however, I do feel that this method would be problematic given the history of the association.

2. Ballot Controls

It is the opinion of the Chief Returning Officer that the ballot controls and safeguard for this election were insufficient to ensure transparency of the count and security of the ballot. Further, the ballot controls for this election lacked an efficient audit trail required for independent verification of the results.

This is due to a number of factors:

- (1) The results of the election were known to the Elections Officials during the balloting process;
- (2) No anonymous audit trail for the ballot, should a recount had become necessary, the recount would have had to be taken place with the student numbers of those who voted being visible.
- (3) No system audit trail kept.

It is the recommendation of the Elections Consultant that for future elections a third party elections software system (such as Simply Voting by ES&S). Elections software program provide the necessary audit trails to ensure that if a recount is required it can be conducted in such a way as would allow for the secrecy of the ballot to be maintained. Further, this software interfaces with most student log in services (such as BlackBoard) in use in the Canadian Educational system.

It is the opinion of the Elections Consultant the use of an “in-house” elections software system allows for the increased possibility of interference of the election system through system vandalism (such as the Western “Justin Bieber” hack) or for election data falsification. A third party off the shelf election software system would mitigate the risk of both system vandalism and data falsification, to levels where a reasonable assurance can be made to this effect.

Further, it is recommended that how-to videos appear on the DCSI social media channels which would tell students how to use the online system to vote, and that candidates be encouraged to use this video when guiding electors through the voting process. This would remove some of the allegations of undue influence by the candidates.

3. Campaign timeline and promotion

It is the opinion of the Elections Consultant that the campaign timeline was too long. It is recommended reducing the voting days from 5 days to three or four days. It is further recommended that the results be realised immediately after being calculated in order to full accountability.

It is recommended that future elections priorities drop-in style events over formal debates. The drop in style events seem to grow student engagement and gave students a chance to meet with the candidates in an informal manner. I would further recommend further work with Riot Radio in order to give the candidates a forum to talk about their view regarding DCSI.

I would further recommend a longer campaign development period - to prepare campaign materials and to have materials approved by elections officials. A number of concerns by candidates and others were raised regarding the tight timelines of the elections cycle.

I finally recommend that the dates for the onboarding and the orientation be included in the candidate’s packages so students are aware of the commitments regarding their position ahead of the elections cycle.

4. Affiliated campaigns

A logical product of having multiple offices being sought at the same election is that some campaigns will seek to affiliate with each other, while the by-law prohibited slates from forming, it defined slates as sharing expenses and a platform. Affiliated campaigns were allowed and did occur. The difference between an affiliated campaign and a slate at times were blurred, since by its very nature the campaigns were related to each other. This caused in my opinion damage to the elections process since the difference between a slate and an affiliated campaign was not understood by everyone. This cannot be allowed to continue in this fashion. It is recommended the election policy discourage slates further by better defining the differences between a slate and an affiliated campaign.

5. General observations

Having made general observations regarding the electoral event, it is the opinion of the elections consultant that the electoral event was in all ways fair and there were no issues of concern regarding procedural irregularities or democratic safeguards.

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