Swinburne Student Union Elections

Report

October 5th –9th 2009

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Preliminary Arrangements

Above Quota Elections was contacted on April 27 and asked to tender for the conduct of the Swinburne Student Association Annual elections. A tender was submitted on May 13. On July 20 AQE were informed we had been accepted for the position. Stephen Luntz was appointed Returning Officer.

Staff

Haydn Steel was appointed Deputy Returning Officer. AQE partner Charlies Sanders assisted with the count. Staff appointed were: Julia Perdevich, Andrew Butterworth, Christie Heart, Helen Cooper, Alex Purchase, Will Purchase, Abby Sandercock, Albert Aranha, Michelle Renda, Sue Sana Bui, Sabine Cotter, Eleri Harris and Chris Heath. Above Quota Elections would like to thank all the staff for their dedication and hard work.

Nominations

Nominations opened on Monday August 31st and closed on Monday 14th September. 41 Nominations were received from 30 candidates.

Withdrawls

No candidates withdrew after nominating

Uncontested Positions
There were no nominations for Lilydale Campus Chair, nor for the Postgraduate Committee

Unopposed Positions

Peter Coates was elected unopposed as Croydon Campus Chair
Abigail Michell was elected unopposed as Queer Representative
Stefan Oberman was elected unopposed as Part Time Representative
Mathew Landolfo was elected unopposed as Mature Age Representative
Calum Weidner was elected unopposed as TAFE/Apprentice Representative
Noel Gardner was elected unopposed as Disability Support Representative

Candidate Resources

The SSU regulations give candidates four sorts of support. In each case minor problems were encountered making these available to candidates. Generally speaking the common conclusion is that unexpected delays can occur and the Returning Officer should start work on these matters earlier than might seem necessary. AQE is reducing its charge for running the election slightly to reflect the fact that not all of the resources were provided as they should have been:

- **Candidate forums**: Candidates indicated an interest in attending forums on the Hawthorn, Prahran and Wantirna campus. All of these were held, but no students other than the candidates themselves turned up, and in the case of Wantirna even the candidates did not attend. In part this may be attributed to a failure on the Returning Officer's part to advertise the forums by the required date. However, it seems unlikely this was the main issue. Information was widely distributed for two of the forums approximately a week in advance, but student interest was low. The fact that only one side in the election (and some independents) wanted to participate in the forums probably contributed.
- **Printing allocations**: Campaign printing was done through Minuteman press. Once the allocations were up and running this apparently went smoothly and we appreciate their assistance. However, partly as a result of an absence by a staff member for several days at a crucial time, the allocations were not available to candidates as early as some would have wished. In future it is recommended that Minuteman be given a list of candidates and allocations at least a week before printing is required in case such issues arise again.
- **Candidate statements**: Only a small number of candidates took the opportunity to submit candidate statements, as allowed under R47. The regulations state that these are to be placed on the SSU website. However, AQE did not have direct access to the website, and our request for statements to be posted was not carried out. We substituted by placing copies of the statements near polling places, but our observation was that few if any students paid any attention. The fact that, once again, only one team chose to take advantage of this opportunity possibly contributed to the low interest shown.
- **Resource kits**: Under R42 candidates are to receive chalk, tape and balloons to be used in campaigning. Prior to the election a discussion was held where AQE indicated that if this was organised by SSU staff we could reduce the cost of running the election, and was led to believe this would happen. Perhaps as a result of a communication breakdown it initially did not, and some campaigners became frustrated at their inability to start campaigning. The problem was eventually sorted out with SSU staff organising most of the resources, but clear discussions of who is to do what, and by what date, need to happen well beforehand in future.

Polling

Polling was conducted in cafeterias from 10:30am-2:00pm and 3pm-5:30 Monday to Thursday at Hawthorn, Prahran, Lilydale, Wantirna and Croydon campuses, and at the same campuses from 10-4 on Friday.

It was suggested during the week that turnout at the Hawthorn campus might be higher if polling was conducted in the Atrium near the Library, rather than in one of several cafes on campus where there was no reason for students to pass close to the booth if they were not coming to eat or drink. I made inquiries about the possibility of moving to the Atrium, but received no response, so never had to fully consider the merits of such a move. In future this may be worth considering well before the election and, if considered desirable, applications should be made in advance.

Ballot Papers

Positions on which all students could vote were put onto two A4 ballot papers (see Appendix in hard copy). A further A5 ballot paper was used for NUS (not available to voters enrolled at TAFE). A5 ballot papers were produced for each of the contested campus chairs.

Postal Votes

One inquiry about a postal vote was received, but when the circumstances required to offer such a vote were explained the inquiry was not taken further.

The Count

The vote was started at 5pm on Friday at the Hawthorn Campus, by which time poll clerks from that campus had had a break. During the count staff from other campuses arrived with their ballot boxes and these were progressively added to the count. Counting finished at 12:30 am on Saturday with the completion of the final position.

Count sheets are included in Appendix 3.

Declaration

Positions were declared during the count, with a declaration posted the following week

A Declaration of election is included in Appendix 4

Complaints and Appeals

Although a number of complaints were received by myself and my deputy these were substantially fewer than for elections of other major student organisations. This may reflect the much smaller numbers of campaigners her as on other campuses.

No major penalties were deemed appropriate, but some campaigners had small amounts of their resource allocations docked for breaches of the rules, and others were banned from campaigning for fairly short periods of time.

As is inevitable some candidates and campaigners deemed these penalties either too harsh or too mild. However, no indication was given that anyone was seriously considering an appeal of a decision of the Returning Officer to the Appeal Committee. This is fortunate, as it was not clear if this body had been constituted, and whether this could be done if necessary. There is a major conflict of interest in the Returning Officer assisting with the establishment of the committee or influencing who might sit on it, so it is essential that someone else have clear responsibility for this role.

Recommendations for Future Elections

The Swinburne Student Union regulations are badly in need of an overhaul. In some areas the best response might be not to start with the regulations as they are, but to simply adopt another university's regulations, since rewriting would be so demanding.

I accept that there are aspects of Swinburne's regulations which the Union will want to keep, but these could easily be fitted together with sections from elsewhere.

Polling hours

Perhaps the most substantial change I would recommend is constitutional, rather than by regulation. That is to abolish the clause requiring that polling be for five days on each campus and for a minimum of six hours a day (C55(6)). Having received zero votes over the first three days at Croydon it is clear that every campus does not need the same number of polling hours.

There has been a regrettable tendency at some universities for incumbent factions to change the polling hours so that the campuses more sympathetic to them are open longer. I can understand the desire to avoid the temptation to this. Nevertheless, a very large portion of the cost of running this election was taken up with employing poll clerks on the smaller campuses, as well as arranging the pick up and delivery of the booths. All this for a combined turnout of less than 150 votes, 16 of which were informal.

Ideally I would suggest that polling be conducted for 12 hours on each campus other than Hawthorn, with it being the Returning Officer's responsibility to work out the best days and times on each campus. I suspect that this would actually raise turnout – if the smaller campuses were open for polling at different times campaigners would be more likely to attend during those times, thus giving students a reason to vote and some information on who to vote for.

If it is not possible to change the constitution, some savings could be made through regulation change. The provision of an hour polling interval on four days does not achieve its goals. In most cases poll clerks had no secure location to lock sensitive material on campus, preventing them from taking a true break. Therefore genuine breaks required having two poll clerks on a campus, at least for part of the day. Since the work on the smaller campuses can easily be handled by one poll clerk at a time, a more genuine break can be achieved by abolishing the interval and having a single poll clerk rotating around the smaller campuses giving each poll clerk a break.

This would avoid the need to have the staff on campus for seven hours, which ethically (and possibly legally) they must be paid for, even though they are only working for six.

Moreover, it does not make sense to make campuses open at the same times. I was informed that one reason for the low turnout at Croydon is that many students came in for evening classes only, and polling was shut by the time they arrived. The Student Council will have a better idea than I whether this is true, but if so it would certainly suggest that Croydon's polling hours should be different from Hawthorn's.

In addition, it would be better to have at least one day of later polling, perhaps with voting running from 12:30 to 6:30 that day. Although not all students attending for evening classes will be on campus on a particular day, this scenario would mean that many after-hours students would have an opportunity to vote. It is unlikely many students would have their only time on campus for the week finishing by midday on one day alone.

If constitutional change is impossible it might be best to simply re-iterate that polling must be for 6 hours a day between 10 am and 8pm in the regulations, and leave it to the Returning Officer to allocate times, in consultation with Student Council, staff and those in the best position to know the times most suitable for each campus.

Campaigner Resources:
The SSU regulations were clearly written with an intent to prevent the enormously expensive campaigns that occur on other campuses. This is reasonable. These campaigns give a major advantage to the richest students (or worse those with wealthy backers) and discourage participation amongst students without access to large amounts of money.

Nevertheless, I think they go to far. Some campuses put a ceiling on expenditure, and require each candidate to present evidence to the Returning Officer they have not exceeded this. A limit of, say, $10 per candidate would still achieve the intention of the regulations while avoiding some problems. Currently, for example, it is arguable that candidates may not spend 10c to print out a copy of their leaflets to take to the printers to be copied, nor use a USB stick to provide the printers with a soft copy. I did not apply this interpretation because it clearly leads to ridiculous outcomes, but it is best to avoid a situation where the regulations can be read in this way. Similarly, some candidates expressed concern that they could not buy textas to cross out errors on their leaflets. A low ceiling on expenditure will remove these issues, as well as providing some opportunity for more innovative campaigning.

To the best of my knowledge not one campaigner made use of the balloons which are one of the campaigner resources. While the cost of these to SSU is no doubt small, the staff time in simply acquiring them may well have cost more. They should either be removed from the kits, or replaced with something more useful.

The campaign forums could potentially be made into a useful opportunity for students to find out more about what each candidate thinks. However, if this is to occur they need to be made more attractive. Perhaps it would be best to schedule them during polling week, once interest has been aroused. Undecided students could be told that a forum will be held later on in the week and encouraged to attend.

Ticket Formalization
It is also worth considering the merits of formalizing tickets so they can be included on the ballot paper. There are disadvantages to this, particularly that it creates extra work for the Returning Officer in processing ticket registrations, thus adding to costs. If the regulations do not include a sensible process for ticket registration there are also dangers of such a process encouraging front tickets.

On the other hand, formalizing tickets has several advantages which probably outweigh the disadvantages. Printing could be done on a ticket basis rather than with candidates having to hand over their allocations to others. One staff member reports that while poll clerking, "Many students wanted to know who the people on the ballot paper were or told me that they just wanted to vote for 'Change' or 'Student Voice'."

While polling staff cannot provide voters with information like this, at Hawthorn they can point out that campaigners are offering this information just outside the polling area if the voter wants to get it. However, at the outlying campuses this is often not the case, and students who may have formed a conclusion who they want to vote for (for example by listening to the debate on 3SSR will have no way of knowing who is with which team.

If this situation is adopted it might be wise to "grandfather" the ticket names so that the respective presidential candidates can take ownership of the names used this year for the future.

Internal Contradictions
Aspects of the regulations simply do not make sense. For example students must be nominated by another student (R26), but can also nominate themselves (R30). Inclusion of such clauses simply wastes everyone's time, and leads to conclusion. Either the requirement to have a nominator should be removed, or the right to nominate one's self.

Student Council Structure
It is always hard to get student organizations to change the structure of their ruling body, since by definition they system is favorable, or at least not unfavorable, to the incumbents. Nevertheless, the lack of proportional representation is a clear problem for SSU. In this case the election was very comfortable, and the numbers of council reflect the voting patterns, but this will not always be the case. A situation where a team with 45% support amongst students can find itself locked out is not healthy for any organization, and particularly one whose continued existence is uncertain.

The ideal system would be to introduce at least some proportionally elected positions. Failing that, if the representatives were elected only by their relevant groups, rather than all students, there might be more diversity in outcomes, with views held by specific minorities given more opportunity to be represented within the Union.

Appendix 1 Nominations

Elizabeth Walsh	President
James Searle	President
Rohan Cannon	Education Vice President
Casper Cumming	Education Vice President
Damian Ridgwell	Secretary/Treasure
Hugh Mortensen	Secretary/Treasure
Lucas Anderson	Acess & Equity Officer
Yao Wang	Acess & Equity Officer
Conrad Corry	Acess & Equity Officer
Daniel Nair Dadich	Hawthorn campus Chair
Langley Tay	Hawthorn campus Chair
Cheng Zhong	Prahran Campus Chair
Kierah Richards	Prahran Campus Chair
Peter Coates	Croydon Campus Chair
Keith Warburton	Wantirna Campus Chair
Michael Macdonald	Wantirna Campus Chair
Abigail Michell	Queer rep
Mia Anstee	Womes Represitive
Gurleen Gulati	Womens Represitive
Dimitri Kotov	Post Graduate Rep
Jagtar Sing	Post Graduate Rep
Andrew Newton	Undergraduate Rep
Zaki Matar	Undergraduate Rep
Stefan Oberman	Part-time rep
Meit Shuh	Internation Student Rep
Simon Nichodemus	Internation Student Rep
Abhishek Sanadya	Internation Student Rep
mathew Landolfo	matuer age rep
Calum James	tafe/Apprentice rep

Weidner	
Noel Leonard Gardiner	Dissablity support rep
Yao Wang	SISA Committee
Elizabeth Walsh	NUS Delegate
Daniel Nair Dadich	NUS Delegate
Damian Ridgwell	NUS Delegate
Zaki Matar	NUS Delegate
Abigail Michell	NUS Delegate
Conrad Corry	NUS Delegate
Hugh Mortensen	NUS Delegate
Noel Leonard Gardiner	NUS Delegate
Langley Tay	NUS Delegate
mathew Landolfo	NUS Delegate

Appendix 2 Ballot Papers
Attached with Hard Copy of the Report

Appendix 3 Count Sheets

President	**Elizabeth Walsh**	**873**	**Elected**
President	James Searle	436	
	Informal	77	
Education Vice President	Rohan Cannon	465	
Education Vice President	**Casper Cumming**	**824**	**Elected**
	Informal	86	
Secretary/Treasurer	**Damian Ridgwell**	**827**	**Elected**
Secretary/Treasure	Hugh Mortensen	463	
	Informal	90	
Access & Equity Officer	**Lucas Anderson**	**771**	**Elected**
Access & Equity Officer	Yao Wang	137	
Access & Equity Officer	Conrad Corry	367	
	Informal	97	
Hawthorn campus Chair	**Daniel Nair Dadich**	**847**	**Elected**
Hawthorn campus Chair	Langley Tay	349	
	Informal	39	
Prahran Campus Chair	**Cheng Zhong**	**52**	**Elected**
Prahran Campus Chair	Kierah Richards	22	
	Informal	3	
Wantirna Campus Chair	Keith Warburton	5	
Wantirna Campus Chair	**Michael Macdonald**	**14**	**Elected**
Women's Representative	Mia Anstee	486	
Women's Representative	**Gurleen Gulati**	**807**	**Elected**
		94	
Post Graduate Rep	Dimitri Kotov	465	
Post Graduate Rep	**Jagtar Singh**	**825**	**Elected**
		86	
Undergraduate Rep	Andrew Newton	488	
Undergraduate Rep	**Zaki Matar**	**807**	**Elected**
		92	
International Student Rep	**Meit Shah**	**741**	**Elected**
International Student Rep	Simon Nichodemus	140	
International Student Rep	Abhishek Sanadya	421	

NUS

CANDIDATE		TOTAL VOTES	HAWTHORN	OTHER	Round 1 ELECT WALSH
Elizabeth Walsh	1	ELECTED	289	24	-313.000000
Hugh Mortensen	1	ELECTED	166	22	
Zaki Matar	1	ELECTED	46	4	103.423100
Damian Ridgwell	1	ELECTED	221	4	
Mathew Landolfo		38.830004	11	0	4.230945
Langley Tay	1	147.532214	107	2	5.641260
Daniel Nair Dadich	1	ELECTED	230	3	
Noel Leonard Gardiner	d	ELIM.	6	0	5.171155
Conrad Corry	d	ELIM.	14	1	2.350525
Abigail Michell		103.134061	10	1	5.171155
DIRECT PREFS		0.000000	0	0	21.154725
INFORMAL/EXHAUST.		125.690292	69	2	
ELECTED VOTES		817.330204	0	0	165.857143
EXPECTED RND. ERR.		-0.000190	0	0	-0.000008
TOTAL		1,232.516585	1169	63	0.000000
TOTAL VOTES CAST		1,169.000000			
TOTAL ELECTED	5	5			1.000000
QUOTA		144.748140			

	Round 2 ELECT DADICH	Round 3 ELECT RIDGWELL	Round 4 ELECT MORTENSEN	Round 5 ELECT MATAR	Round 6 ELIM GARDINER	Round 7 ELIM CORRY
Elizabeth Walsh						
Hugh Mortensen			-188.000000			
Zaki Matar	49.276557	48.891402	0.942256	-252.533315		
Damian Ridgwell		-225.000000				
Mathew Landolfo	1.152668	1.314285	0.824474	10.280337	4.155423	5.871873
Langley Tay	1.729002	0.525714	19.316248	2.805673	2.000000	6.514317
Daniel Nair Dadich	-233.000000					
Noel Leonard Gardiner	1.440835	0.788571	0.117782	0.718331	-14.236674	
Conrad Corry	2.017169	1.051428	0.471128	0.901939	4.323394	-26.115584
Abigail Michell	2.017169	1.839999	0.000000	72.935762	3.024895	7.145081
DIRECT PREFS	9.509511	4.731426	-35.395662	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
INFORMAL/EXHAUST.			35.866790	11.506228	0.732962	6.584313

Appendix 4 Declaration of Election

The following candidates have been declared elected:

Elizabeth Walsh as President

Casper Cumming as Education Vice President

Damian Ridgwell as Secretary/Treasurer

Lucas Anderson as Access & Equity Officer

Abigail Michell as Queer Representative

Stefan Oberman as Part Time Representative

Mathew Landolfo as Mature Age Representative

Calum Weidner as TAFE/Apprentice Representative

Noel Gardner as Disability Support Representative

Gurleen Gulati as Women's Representative

Jagtar Singh as Postgradudate Representative

Zaki Matar as Undergraduate Representative

Meit Shah as International Student Representative

Daniel Nair Dadich as Hawthorn Campus Chair

Cheng Zhong as Prahran Campus Chair

Michael Macdonald as Wantirna Campus Chair

Peter Coates as Croydon Campus Chair

Stephen Luntz
Above Quota Elections
Returning Officer