

WORKING AS A UNIVERSITY TO HELP SHAPE A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE FOR STUDENT GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Faculty Senate Task Force for Excellence in Equity, Inclusion, and Citizenship (TEEIC)

Introduction: A Cooperative Effort

In response to the Faculty Senate Steering Committee's desire to affect the Spring 2014 Student Government Association elections, the TEEIC focused its initial efforts on discovering potential areas for election reform. To fulfill this request, the TEEIC has worked closely with numerous groups and officials in an effort that would be characterized as cooperative, progressive, and motivated by a genuine desire to develop a model system for student government elections. Those particularly noteworthy of thanks include Vice President for Student Affairs Mark Nelson, Assistant Director of the Office of Student Conduct Kelli Knox-Hall, and the members of the Elections Board co-chaired by two exceptional students, Robert Herron and Madalyn Vaughn. Together, the TEEIC and the Elections Board found numerous areas of common concern, as the Elections Board is also working swiftly to implement changes prior to the 2014 SGA Elections.

Beyond working with these individuals, the TEEIC also conducted an in depth review of the Student Government Elections manual and the Student Code of Conduct. We were pleased to learn that SGA elections are governed by a 22 page code that is reviewed and modified annually in an ongoing effort to make student government elections fair, affordable, and inclusive. As an outgrowth of this cooperative effort, the TEEIC is aware of the following areas of opportunity that will move the University toward a model system for student government elections.

New Policies and Structures

- I. **Additional Regulations to Prevent Obstruction of SGA Elections.** The Task Force recommends adding a new section to the SGA Elections manual titled *Campaign Obstruction of Elections* which includes the following new regulations:
 - A. No person shall violate the right to privacy in voting by observing how a student votes.
 - B. Requiring a student to produce evidence of voting or voting for specific candidates, for example, through voting in front of someone or producing a photo of one's ballot, is prohibited.
 - C. Retaliation for reporting election violations is prohibited.

- II. **Language Prohibiting Coercing Students to Vote.** Add to Section 3 of the SGA Elections Manual, language that prohibits coercing students to vote through “threats” or offering “anything of tangible value.” That is, protect a student’s right *not* to vote by prohibiting coercion to vote.
- III. **Mechanisms to Monitor and Enforce New and Existing Election Codes.** We encourage the Elections Board or other relevant bodies to develop practical means to police the new codes presented here, as well as existing codes that ensure student voting rights and the integrity of SGA elections.
- IV. **Extension of the Statute of Limitation for being Held Accountable for Voter Fraud.** Add language to the Voter Fraud Section of the Elections Manual (Section 10 D.) that clarifies that students can still report voter fraud after eight hours of the fraudulent action and that students and organizations can still be held accountable for voter fraud after eight hours of the action. We recommend that students can be held accountable for committing election violations until the election of new SGA executives and senators for the following academic year.
- V. **Clarification of What Qualifies as a Residence Hall in Campaigning.** Clarify in Section 2.E of the SGA Elections Manual that the campaign regulations governing residence halls apply to Mallet Assembly, on-campus apartments, and fraternity and sororities. To further ensure that all residence halls are treated the same, clarify that the prohibition on the hanging of campaign banners applies to Mallet Assembly, on-campus apartments, and fraternities and sororities.
- VI. **Language Prohibiting Mobile Voting Stations Off Campus.** Modify the language of Section 7 B of the Elections Manual so that it reads “Candidates or organizations may not set up mobile voting stations, laptops or polling locations to solicit votes on or off campus.” The current language prohibits such activities only on campus.
- VII. **Increases in Financial Penalties for Election Code Violations.** The Task Force recognizes the importance of exercising discretion in determining the size of fines for election code violations. However, to serve as a stronger deterrent to committing violations, we recommend that the minimum fine begin at \$50.00 and escalate contingent upon the seriousness or recurring nature of the violation. The current fines for minor violation range from \$5.00 to \$25.00 and are perceived as being too small and affordable to deter violations.
- VIII. **Acknowledgement of Students Rights on Election Ballots.** On ballots, include a statement of voting rights that students must acknowledge having read before registering their candidate preferences (see Appendix A on page 5).
- IX. **Acknowledgment of the Capstone Creed on Election Ballots.** Similarly, have the students acknowledge having read the Capstone Creed before registering their candidate preferences. (see Appendix A on page 5)

- X. **Short Rollover Statements of Candidate Platforms on Ballots.** Structure that ballot so that each Senatorial and Executive office candidate has a short rollover statement of their campaign platform. Allow the candidates to include their party identification on their rollover statements.¹
- XI. **Web Connections to Broader Statements of Candidate Platforms.** Provide web connections on ballots that allow voters to connect to broader statements of each candidate's campaign platform.
- XII. **Voting Polls in 2015 Contingent on the 2014 SGA Elections.** Whether to return to voting polls proved to be the most highly debated reform considered. By a narrow margin, a majority of Task Force members supported returning to voting polls for SGA elections. However, all members recognized the difficulty of implementing voting polls in 2014. To manage 12 polls with two staff members working in two-hour shifts over two days could require between 144 to 288 trained staff members. All members, by contrast, supported the idea of monitoring the outcome of the 2014 elections and the effects of the implementation of other reforms to help determine whether polls should be used for the 2015 SGA elections.
- XIII. **Reforms Considered but Not Supported.** Beyond the preceding reforms, the Task Force also considered whether to allow Executive Office candidates to use chalk in their campaigns; to allow campaigning on Vimeo, Tumblr, and Pinterest; to raise campaign spending limits; to place candidate party identifications on the ballot; to penalize infraction through taking away votes from candidates; and to deny students the right to vote in upcoming elections if found guilty of elections violations.

Developing a New Elections Culture at UA: An Annual Campus Citizenship Campaign and Comprehensive Efforts to Develop Model Citizens

To help reduce the apathy of politically alienated students, to develop model campus citizens, and to inform students of their political rights and protections, the TEEIC recommends an annual campus citizenship campaign and a comprehensive socialization effort to develop a new culture at UA.

- I. **An Annual Campus Citizenship Campaign.** We recommend that Student Affairs, the Faculty Senate, University Relations, and faculty experts work together to develop and execute an annual citizenship campaign that encourages students to actively participate as members of our University community by exercising their voting rights and becoming involved in student government. As a part of the campaign we recommend:
 - A. Utilize contemporary social media and the Crimson White to disseminate the citizenship campaign messages.

¹The Task Force debated at length and was divided over whether to recommend a partisan ballot—that is, including the party identification of SGA candidates on the ballot. Allowing party identification on the rollover position statement of candidates' proved to be an acceptable alternative to everyone.

- B. As part of the citizenship campaign, make a point to clarify student voting rights, remind students of their obligation to report and speak-out against campaign violations, and assure students protections against retaliation for reporting campaign violations.
- C. Tailor the citizenship campaign to a variety of audiences, including both independent and Greek audiences.
- D. Use the Faculty Senate listserv to help promote the campaign and specifically encourage faculty to, *voluntarily*, encourage their students to vote and to become involved in student government.
- E. Where relevant to the classroom learning objectives and with voluntary consent, involve public relations classes, communication classes, and political sciences classes in designing and disseminating the citizenship campaign.

II. **A Comprehensive Efforts to Develop Model Citizens.** We further recommend that Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and relevant faculty experts work together to affect SGA elections as a part of a comprehensive effort to develop model campus citizens. Involving both the academic and extracurricular sides of the University, this effort might include a common ethical component and common call to civic duty across the myriad of leadership development and personal development programs on campus.

This effort might also include new lower-level courses and redesigned existing courses directed at inculcating ethical behavior and civic duty early in a college student's career. Developing model citizenship will be a recurring theme that *will be addressed in greater detail in future reports.*

Appendix A. Your Voting Rights and Obligations <preceding the ballot>

Instructions: In the left hand column, please check every box acknowledging that you have read and understand the Capstone Creed and your voting rights and responsibilities.

- Capstone Creed.** As a member of the University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge; act with fairness, honesty, and respect; foster individual and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence.”

You have a right:

- To cast a vote and to do so in privacy. No one is to observe how you vote.
- Not* to present evidence of voting or voting for specific candidates, for example, through voting in front of someone, producing photos (“screenshots”) of your ballot, or providing evidence of your voting receipt.
- To vote for the candidates of your choice without consequences—not to be coerced or influenced to vote for specific candidates through rewards or threats such as fines and community service requirements.
- Not* to vote without consequences—not to be coerced or influenced to vote through rewards or threats, such as fines or community service requirements.
- Not* to be retaliated against for reporting a voting rights violations.
- To the confidentiality of your report of a voting rights violations.

Note: *You have an obligation to report any violations of the preceding voting rights.* If your voting rights are violated or you observe another person’s voting rights being violated, contact University officials at the following email address or phone number: _____ . Your report will be investigated, and, unless you instruct otherwise, the staff responsible for addressing voting rights violations will protect the confidentiality of your report