



SGGB

University of Pittsburgh
Student Government Board

**Final Report of the 2021 Student Government Board
Election Procedures Review Task Force**

April 11th, 2021

Introduction/Background

The 2021 Student Government Board (SGB) election process brought forth a number of concerns and ideas from a broad spectrum of students at the University of Pittsburgh. These concerns and ideas are directed at a number of areas that are under the purview of the organization. These include the Elections Code, Judicial hearing procedures and associated aspects of the organization. In an effort to systematically review these concerns and ideas, the following task force is charged to review, deliberate, and ultimately report all relevant information regarding the 2021 Election and further steps to improve on policies and practices of SGB. The purpose and membership of this group will reflect the diversity of thought and perspectives necessary to get a deeper understanding of the past election and the long-term relationship between SGB procedures and the public at-large.

The Task Force was comprised of the following members:

- Executive Chair (non-voting unless needed): Eric Macadangdang
- Vice-Chair: Ben King
- Vice-Chair: Katie Richmond
- General Body Member: Danielle Obisie-Orlu, Resident Student Association
- General Body Member: Darren Campuzzano, WPTS
- General Body Member: Grace, O'Malley, Swanson School of Engineering
- General Body Member: Madelynn Lederer, Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences
- Ex-Officio Member (Staff Advisor): Steve Anderson

Overview of Work Done

Over the course of several weeks, the Task Force worked to better understand both the specific events associated with the 2021 Election and the general areas of opportunity in SGB's Elections Code. To do so, the Task Force did the following:

1. Administered a public comment online form for the general student body to provide feedback on their thoughts regarding the Election season. In total, there were 89 responses and 31 of them contained additional, written input.
2. Conducted interviews with the committees, slates, and individuals directly involved in the infraction hearing process leading up to the Election. An hour-long, recorded interview was conducted by at least 2 task force members to the following: the SGB Elections Committee Chair and associated members, the SGB Judicial Committee Chair and associated members, the Vision Slate (consisting of Joe Landsittel, Daniel Rudy, Nadine Sadaka, and Jessie Rindfleisch), and the complainant (Tyler Viljaste). The Task Force also read any written statements that were submitted by the groups and individuals as a means to supplement the interviews.

3. Reviewed written and recorded materials associated with the infraction and subsequent hearings, including the recorded hearings of both committees.
4. Reviewed the most updated SGB Elections Code

Summary of Findings

The following findings are based on interviews conducted with the Elections Committee, Judicial Committee, Vision Slate, and the complainant in the specific infraction. In addition, these findings are based upon feedback and input from 89 total submissions as part of the Task Force's public comment period (see attachment). Finally, findings were made based upon relevant documents, including materials used for the infraction hearing, written statements from slates, and the SGB Elections Code.

1. Significant and consistent frustration with the timing of events. Committees, slates, individuals involved, and the general public understand that conducting official business into the night and directly leading up to Election Day may have caused confusion.
 - a. The issue of timing consists of both the proximity of the hearing to the election, as well as the rushed late-night timeline of the hearing, which compounded in this instance.
2. The current options for sanctions are limited and at times inadequate.
3. Infractions or situations that may involve or implicate other outside departments, offices, or policies need to be connected better with the current Election infraction process.
4. The infraction that was originally submitted by the complainant was different from the infraction that the Elections Committee found the Vision Slate to be guilty of.
5. There was difficulty by the committees in pinpointing specific members of the slate who were guilty of the violation. Additionally, not all individuals involved in the infraction were present at the initial hearing held by the Elections Committee, leading to frustration and confusion throughout the hearing.
6. There was general dissatisfaction amongst some about the conduct of committee and slate members either during the course of the campaign or during the infraction hearings process
7. Public Comment and interviews with slates and candidates have highlighted lackluster communication on the part of the Student Government Board regarding the infraction, hearing, and committee decision. Although this was inherently a difficult topic to convey to the public at-large due to the short time notice, SGB did not utilize all available platforms to disseminate important information.

8. The Vision Slate felt ill-prepared for the hearings and did not have an opportunity to provide rebuttal arguments during the Judicial hearing.
9. The current language of the Elections Code did not adequately support SGB's goals and requires several updates.

Summary of Recommendations

Based upon the above findings, the Task Force recommends the following items for consideration:

1. Limit activities that can be done on or right before Elections Day to be reconciled after the polls close. Issues that do not pose an immediate threat to the election or pose an immediate threat to the health and well-being to students that occur within 48 hours of the start of the election can and should be dealt with through proceedings after Election Day activities.
 - a. Removal of the elections code procedures requiring action taken on an infraction within 24 hours of receiving the infraction. Recommends the elections committee acts in a timely manner on all received infractions as they deem appropriate given proximity to the election.
 - b. The Elections Chair is required to delay the announcement of election results to allow for complaints to be filed within 24 hours of polls closing.
 - i. This would result in an election result announcements being delayed until Wednesday night at the earliest.
 - c. Hearings and investigations should only be conducted between 8am and 8pm.
2. Expand the current options for sanctions that can be imposed on a candidate or slate found guilty of an infraction and provide better guidance on sanction usage. The Elections Committee should, to the best of their ability, consider sanctions that reflect and more directly mitigate against the effects of the infraction.
 - a. All but the most egregious violations, such as those threatening the health or well-being of students or the viability of the election, should not be punished punitively.
 - b. The Elections Committee should consider related educational training as a sanction if possible.
3. If an infraction may be in violation of a policy or rule that falls outside of the Elections Code, then the Committee should consult with the group that maintains the policy and defer to their interpretation, if practical. A representative from the group may provide their expertise to the Committee before and during any proceedings.

4. Restrict discussions in hearings and investigations to the infraction that the hearing or investigation was convened for. If evidence of a new violation is discovered during an investigation or hearing, a subsequent hearing or investigation should be held after the defendant is made aware of all possible charges.
5. Violations of the Elections Code should be considered on an individual basis. All individual defendants should be present for hearings.
6. More direct integration of the Code of Ethics should be used while finalizing the candidate pool. All candidates and committee members should be aware of the behavior that is expected of them as potential or active members of SGB.
7. Clear and consistent communication in all possible outlets should be a priority of the Elections Committee and SGB as a whole. More comprehensive and effective communication to the student body and better usage of student-body-wide email sent on behalf of the Elections Chair on Election Day can relay pertinent updates regarding recent activities in the Election.
8. Allow for rebuttal arguments in appeal hearings before the Judicial Committee, and provide more clarity on the scope of review in such hearings. The Elections and Judicial Committees should ensure that all parties are informed and comfortable with procedures prior to hearings.
9. Revise the Elections Code to remove redundant and dated language and improve readability.
10. Prevent any individual who has been a member of the Elections or Judicial committees in the current academic year from being a candidate in the election.
11. Codify policies of the Elections Committee Financial Assistance Program.
12. Reduce focus on and involvement of the complainant and have the Elections Committee conduct an independent investigation of all complaints.

Conclusion

The 2021 Election was challenging for many people within and outside of SGB. The current policies and practices within were insufficient to deal with the activities that occurred on and just prior to the SGB Election Day. Through thorough work, review, and deliberation, the Task Force believes that the above recommendations will help mitigate against several major issues in future elections.