



Report to AMS Council RE: Diversity and Decreasing Barriers to Participation in AMS Executive Elections

As a result of a motion passed by AMS Council in March 2020, the Student Life Committee, the Human Resources Committee, and the President's Office have been evaluating ways of how the AMS can work to "improve the diversity of candidates in AMS Elections" who are running for Executive positions.

After reviewing a number of thoughts, ideas, and concerns, as well as recent AMS electoral history, we decided to focus our attention on how the AMS can reduce barriers so that students, and especially those from equity-seeking populations, are able to better participate in the AMS Elections process. The following four recommendations were identified as having the greatest potential of reducing barriers that students may encounter when running for an AMS Executive position.

Recommendation 1: Creating more accessible ways for students to access information and insights about AMS Elections and Executive roles.

A considerable barrier that many students face when deciding to run for election is figuring out where to start and how to get involved. Historically, students who are interested in running would usually seek out a meeting with the incumbent Executive to find out more about the elections process, the role, and how to campaign effectively.

Not only can this potentially be a very intimidating way of discovering information, but it also allows incumbent Executives to more effectively manipulate potential candidates. Incumbents are able to pick favourites, selectively share information, and even gain advantages if they are considering re-election. While it is impossible to entirely prevent this behaviour, as one on one meetings will always occur, there are ways to level the playing field a bit.

This report proposes the introduction of structured informational workshop sessions that potential candidates can attend to learn more about AMS Elections, including how to campaign at UBC, how to do interviews, and what being an Executive is like. Ideally, incumbent Executives will also participate so that they are able to answer questions and give more insights.

Responsible Units: Executive Committee, Student Life Committee, Elections Committee

Recommendation 2: Considerably reducing our elections timeline.

The AMS Elections process lasts around two months from start to finish, and this amount of emotional time commitment can be very intimidating and burdensome for many students who are focused on their academics. This report recommends that this timeline be reduced significantly to eliminate this barrier to participation.

Many other student unions across the country are able to run their elections process, from nominations to results, within a two-week timeframe. We are recommending that the AMS strive to modify our elections timeline to fall within a similar timeframe. It is also important to note that any changes that are made should also still accommodate mandated timelines for elections for Board of Governors and Senators as required by the University Act. It is likely that there will need to be two nomination period timelines, and then a unified voting period timeline.

Voter turnout is often a reason why many people hesitate reducing the election period timeline, but recent samples of AMS Elections voter turnout evidently shows that voter turnout is much more influenced by what's on the ballot and engaging campaigns rather than the length of time.

2018 Elections (2 week campaign/voting period): 20.4%

2019 Elections (3 week campaign/voting period): 21.7%

2020 Elections (2 week campaign/voting period): 11.6%

2020 Special Election (2 week campaign/voting period): 6.1%

This report recommends condensing the whole process into two-to-three weeks. Here is a simplified example of what that may look like on a 2021 timeline:

Friday, February 12th: Nominations/Material Approvals Open (Digital Signatures)

Wednesday, February 24th: Nominations Close

Thursday, February 25th: Campaign Period Begins

Monday, March 1st: Voting Period Begins

Friday, March 5th: Voting Period Ends

Responsible Units: Governance Committee, Elections Committee

Recommendation 3: Increasing salaries for AMS Executives.

AMS Executives are currently paid \$38,444 pre-tax for the 2020/21 Fiscal Year, which comes in around middle of the pack when compared to other student societies in Canada. When factored down to an hourly wage based on full-time hours (not including overtime), the result is approximately \$19.71/hr pre-tax. While only slightly exceeding the most recent living wage calculation for Vancouver of \$19.50, this rate has often fallen below that rate in the past (in 2018 a living wage was \$20.91). Given the large scope of work and performance expectations that are set for Executives, this salary may not be seen as worth it for students who aren't already passionate about politics or student government. This may be seen as a deterrent for students who might prefer to find other opportunities such as WorkLearn positions that pay more, and have more convenient hours and less pressure.

It has also been brought to the attention of past Executives that some Indigenous students have been deterred from running due to the fact that they receive a larger amount of income from Band or UBC related scholarship/support funding, and would become ineligible for that funding when taking a full time salaried position. This issue should also be examined further as to ensure that Indigenous students are not facing these barriers to seeking elected office when they otherwise would have.

Responsible Units: Human Resources Committee

Recommendation 4: Reaching out to equity-seeking communities.

As the Society continues to develop its first ever standalone Equity Plan, much thought should be put into how the AMS is reaching equity-seeking groups on campus to ensure they are feeling empowered to seek leadership positions.

Recommendations include ensuring that relevant strategies are included in the AMS Equity Plan, creating hiring practices that allow better representation from equity-seeking groups, and outreach to clubs and other student groups on campus to develop and grow interest and empowered involvement.

Responsible Units: Student Life Committee, Executive Committee, Elections Committee, Advocacy Committee