Minutes of the AMS Governance Committee

(Minutes for January 28, 2021 Meeting at 5pm | Zoom)

Attendance

Present: Kamil Kanji (Chair), Sheldon Goldfarb (Archivist and Clerk of Council), Saad Shoaib (VP External), Romina Hajizadeh, Alina Bhimji (Vice-Chair), Cole Evans (President), Rebecca Liu, Katherine Feng

Regrets: Teddy O'Donnell

Guests:

Recording Secretary: Alina Bhimji (Vice-Chair)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 pm.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Approval of the Agenda

Moved: Saad       Seconded: Katherine

“BE IT RESOLVED THAT the agenda be adopted.”
Agenda Items

1. Introductions

2. Approval of Minutes

Moved: Seconded:

“BE IT RESOLVED the Governance Committee meeting minutes of November 22 are approved”

TABLED

3. Governance Review Update

Cole: not changing board structure – too much to do too little time. Might Request for Proposal (RFP) – create a new governance review; still TBD; no harm or cost to it.

Kamil: haven't we done that?

Cole: we did but by the time we do another one, it will have been 6 years since completed, 8 years since started. Good to do a check-up now. Could have last reviewer come in and do a check-up to see what we did and what we didn’t accomplish. 

Aside from board structure changes, we can focus on committee structures. Have an informal committee structure prepared:

1. dissolution of operations and splitting it up
   a. right now it does a collection of things
   b. doesn't really have a purpose
   c. goal is to split that work into a few other committees
   d. clubs goes to Student Life Com
   e. new committee for property+infrastructure - right now we don’t really have a committee for this, it's all over the place

2. Switching up HR Com a bit
   a. More oversight over some positions for centralized approach

3. Might look to make each committee’s work more high-level
a. Some committees are getting bogged down in procedural approvals/minor changes that could be done elsewhere
b. Committees should focus on strategic goal-setting

Katherine: recently, Fin Com did stop reviewing small things for subcommittees. If Operations Com is gone, where will its work move to?

Cole: the work can go to a lot of places. Could go to the Sustainability subcommittee, property and infrastructure. Still TBD.
Hatch committee doesn't really need to be an official subcommittee, same with clubs and societies, their work can be done by staff.
SL Com could move some work to VP Admin regarding clubs and stay informed with VP admin.

Saad: what is the relationship between events and SL Com? We haven't; seen events coming from SL. Having oversight/partnership between student gov and events side could be beneficial.

Cole: last year, we reviewed SL to give it more relevance. The committee doesn’t have much incentive to meet and they don’t have much substantial conversation. The vision is to have dedicated staff to attend meetings and join the conversation: eg. GovComm + policy advisor. Goal is to Assign the relevant staff to join those committees and their conversations.
SL is supposed to receive reports from Events and Marketing managers but currently are not working towards that.

Kamil: employer relations committee - oversight of the CEO. the CEO role should be a bit more independent.

Cole: not so much for overseeing the work but more so for asking questions and maintaining rules. Make sure the people who are in their roles are happy, supported, know what work they're doing. Gives them a designated body to go to to discuss such things.

Saad: agree. Even right now the CEO reports to Council – fully elected officials. There's nothing we can really do because even if you were to put a staff in charge of overseeing elections as an independent figure, they will still report to an executive/elected official. I see the concern but it's not something we can really do anything about.
Kamil: is the goal to have this committee structure to be in place this year or next year?

Cole: approve some time this fiscal year and try it out for the last little bit of the year. Then it can be passed on. Concerned about starting a new year with a new committee structure without trying it first. Could introduce at March 2 Council meeting. At the same meeting we would have to appoint chairs for property+infrastructure, and the others can stay the same/ people can move around.

Katherine: GovComm consistently has a lot of work to do. Is anything going to be done in this new structure to help reduce its workload? [answer later]

[later] Cole: we considered steering committee playing an active role in council related topics like council agenda. There’s not a lot of things that are moveable to another committee. Non-voting members, elections items, all fall under GovComm. If we remove council stuff it might help a bit.

Kamil: we could also increase meeting frequency as the way to help with the workload

Cole: we’ll try to look at that and see where we can move things. Ideally, every committee should be able to have a meeting every two weeks and Fin Com and GovCom should meet weekly.

Romina: some committees just meet more. We could raise committee chair wages for the committees who have more work and meet more. HR Com could look into that.

Sheldon: you’re asking how governance can handle all its work. We never met two times a week but we usually met for longer. Committee chairs used to be paid for 12 hours a week but then it was reduced to 6 and 3, so that is changeable

Kamil: it would also be beneficial if Council members got honorariums at the end of the year as incentive for committee to work and get work done.

4. SSM/Non-Voting Members on AMS Committees

Context: when committee appointments were made, there was a gap in people interested in Finance committee so SSM took the position. Suggestion that SSM
shouldn't be on Fin Com. suggestion for Code change, which was not approved. Saad suggested if we are talking about SSM we should change it to apply to all non-voting BoG and Senate on committees.

Kamil: we want to make a decision on how we want to engage with all non-voting members on all AMS Committees

Saad: if we are restricting the SSM, we should restrict all elected representatives who do not have a fiduciary duty to our society. I do see the value in it and I want to hear what the student senators and BoG reps think about this.

Opinion: the SSM is hired, by elected representatives. If SSM restricted from Finance Com, then all people who do not have a fiduciary duty to our society should be non-voting

Katherine: it would have been nice to consult with the reps directly.

Kamil: I have emailed them but no response.

Saad: we should ask again. While Council wants movement, i dont think its right to make this decision without consultation. We want to know what the rationale would be.

Suggest: It would be best to add this as a discussion to next council so we can discuss with them in front of council and decide then.

Kamil: good idea.

Cole: will put on next council agenda.

5. Election Items

1. Review campaign material before it goes out or Elections Com acts retroactively.
2. Postering

Saad: originally I was in support of keeping approvals. After hearing the discussions at council about posters and talking to people who have ran in elections, it puts pressure on one person throughout the electoral period to both facilitate the election and do clerical work like looking at materials

Its a pro for CEO and also a pro for campaigners because they can release material whenever they want, instead of waiting for approval
I think it will still have a disadvantage for people who haven't ran before because they will make mistakes and get penalized. For small violations there should be a warning first and then a disciplinary measure.

In terms of postering, they were banned for a reason. If the AMS itself wants to advertise the election they can use posters, but after talking to people who have ran in elections it's actually just a huge stress.

Kamil: I'm on board and want to move in that direction.

Saad: what's Cole's opinion?

Cole: we should remove the code for approving materials. Agree with Saad that it would be good that they're being fair to new candidates but at the end of the day that's an Elections Committee call. It's also not too hard for a candidate to read rules and follow them.

Posters – we should simplify the code so that “only AMS elections shall be permitted to use posters for campaigning”

Can create a poster wall and post candidate posters but candidates can't

Kamil: agree with that

Sheldon: current code says that candidates can't use posters but Elections Com can use them. Perhaps that means elections committee can solicit material from candidates and use it. If we want to do that we should clarify it in code.

Kamil: i'm in favour of clarifying that

Saad: the intention of getting rid of posters was 1. Sustainability, 2. Fights between candidates about posters.

We're forgetting about sustainability. Even if the committee solicits material from candidates we forget one of the main reasons for banning posters. We will end up in the same place as before.

Alina: agree with Saad

Kamil: agree. There is a lot coming from posters when it comes from candidates. In that case it seems like code doesn't need to be changed.
Sheldon: elections committee was gonna include that candidates can submit material to us and we will put it up. But we haven't changed the code yet.

Saad: from what we've seen in the 2020 election, the committee was promoting the election and individual candidates were not postering. What the committee and council decides should be delivered to the committee post-haste

Kamil: what wording would make it work best to say the only postering allowed is to promote candidate names and the position they’re running for - not solicit material from candidates.

Sheldon: I can word that, and tell Elections Com that we are doing this.

Kamil: a poster with candidate names and what they’re running for. Not material from the candidates.

Sheldon: candidate pictures on posters?

Kamil: yes that works

Sheldon: can draft for our next meeting
What about approval?

Kamil: do we think we should strike approvals?
No objections. We should strike them.

Sheldon: will review for next meeting.

6. Elections Appeal Report

Context:
-Last elections appeals meeting revealed some things we need to change.
-Requirement about timeline for appeals getting done which led the Com to scramble during this case.
-The appeal structure is also weird - speaker of council, rep from elections team, rep from candidates team. It's really just the speaker of council making decisions because each side advocates for their own position anyways. We need to revisit appeal structure.
- They encourage us to add two Students-at-Large which Cole disagrees with because they don’t have enough knowledge.
- We can also consider how to expand the Elections Com to oversee constituency elections

Katherine: with SaL, I have faith in them to read documents that are sent out. They don’t have any duty to the society though so there might be issues with personal information not being kept confidential. I’m not sure how much of an issue that is.
I also find it strange that to bring up an issue of a constituency election you have to go through the constituency before reaching the AMS. It’s an extra barrier and can also lead to disagreements.

Saad: agree with Katherine. Our elections appeal process wants to mimic the court system. There are two variables: reducing the barrier - are constituency appeals committees prepared to deal with these issues? Is there going to be any issues of impartiality?
The elections appeals Com at the AMS level can play a more established and standardized role.
What does the future of elections appeals committee look like?
What does the relationship between Elections Appeals Com and constituency appeal committees look like?

Next Meeting

The next meeting is TBD.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:01 pm.