

## COLLEGE OF ELECTORS

TO: Members of the College of Electors

SPONSOR: Françoise Ko, Chair of the College of Electors

DATE: September 9, 2009 for September 24, 2009

RE: **Agenda Item 8 – Proposal for the Refinement of the Interview Process for Alumni Governor Candidates**

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I would like to ask the College of Electors to reconsider the interview process used as part of the evaluation of candidates for alumni members of the Governing Council. Continuing members will recall that a recommendation to revise the process was proposed at the meeting held on March 25, 2009. Since that time, members of the 2008-09 Executive Committee of the College and I have had the opportunity to receive input from members of the College during informal coffee meetings. Based on the feedback from those discussions, I believe it would be valuable for the College to consider the most appropriate method for identifying and obtaining the best candidate(s).

**Background Information:** The general process to be followed in the election of the alumni members of the Governing Council is outlined in the Constitution of the College of Electors (Section VI. B. 1-6, page 5; March 25, 2008). It defines several parameters and notes that:

“Candidates may be invited to appear before the College, or a group of members of the College, for personal interviews, as the College determines. The interviews will be held *in camera* and discussed only with members of the College.” (Section VI B. 1, page 5)

For a number of years, it has been our practice to invite short-listed candidates to meet with the full College for an interview. Candidates are first made aware of the possible requirement to participate in an interview through information contained on the application form. They are then reminded of the possible interview date when contacted by the Secretary to confirm receipt of their application. Once the College has created a short list of candidates to be interviewed, the candidates are sent a detailed letter (see Appendix A) which outlines the interview process. Candidates are required to attend a fifteen to twenty-five minute interview with all forty-five members of the College. These interviews have typically been held between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on a weekday, in the formal Council Chamber in Simcoe Hall. On the evening of the interview, candidates are met by a past alumni governor, who reminds them of the formal environment in which the interview will be held.

Despite the many steps taken to prepare candidates for the interview setting, they have often still expressed surprise at having had to meet with such a large number of interviewers. For many years, the majority of candidates have stated that the College of Elector’s interview process was most unpleasant, and that they would not voluntarily undergo such a process again. Feedback recently provided to the Chair of the College of Electors by both successful and unsuccessful applicants indicates that they felt ambushed in an impersonal environment. The lack of opportunity to engage in conversation with members of the College was noted, and applicants stated that they would have preferred to discuss the role of the alumni governor in a more intimate setting and in more depth. Some applicants left with the impression that members of the College were not open-minded, and they did not trust the evaluation process. The large, serious-faced group was very unwelcoming, and it was not a positive atmosphere. Only one of five former nominees who were willing to provide feedback

to the Chair stated that they had enjoyed the process. The other four stated that, knowing what they know today, they certainly would never consider re-applying.

The College has frequently discussed the importance of a fair, respectful, and professional process in evaluating and electing candidates. We know that the existing process can result in a daunting experience for many candidates. These prospective volunteers are required to respond to interview questions in a formal setting in front of a large number of people. Such a process is not welcoming, and it does not allow for an in-depth discussion with the candidates. With a larger applicant pool, it is even more important to ensure that the interview and assessment processes are managed carefully and sensitively, so that candidates feel they have had the opportunity to present their perspectives and outline the contributions they expect to make. The candidates invest significant time and effort into the application process, and the process the College follows should a) demonstrate the College's interest in and appreciation of this effort and b) use the College's and candidates' time effectively.

### **Refinement to the College of Electors' Interview Process:**

A revised approach could help to strengthen the process and improve candidates' experiences. I would like to suggest that, once the full College has conducted the initial screening of applications and established a short list, a small group of members of the College conduct the interviews of the candidates rather than the entire College. I propose that the interview committee consist of the five members of the Executive Committee, four of whom are elected by the College, and two members co-opted from the College.

The ability to engage candidates in a smaller group setting would likely prove to be more effective than in an interview with forty-five people. Such a process would also allow the Committee to gather additional information from the candidate in a more meaningful way. As a result of this more limited interaction, unsuccessful candidates might be more willing to reapply to serve as alumni governor in future years. This will become particularly important as an increased pool of highly qualified candidates present themselves for a limited number of seats. Where a candidate may not be successful one year, their expertise may be particularly complementary to a given cohort in a different year and we will want to maintain a pool of willing candidates.

As I indicated above, the College's Constitution (Section VI B. 1, page 5) provides for such an approach. This proposed process is analogous to the appointment of the Chancellor by the College and to the appointment of the President by the Governing Council. In both cases, a smaller group screens and interviews the candidates, subsequently making a recommendation to the larger governance body for approval.

The proposed evaluation could include the following steps:

- The College would participate in the development of a short list of perhaps four candidates to be invited to attend an interview with the interview committee.
- The College would participate in the development of the set interview questions and would identify any additional candidate-specific questions to be used during the interview.
- The interview committee would conduct interviews of the most suitable individuals identified by the College.
- Following the interviews, the interview committee would prepare a report for the College, which would contain its recommendation of candidates for alumni governors. The number of candidates recommended by the committee would correspond to the number of seats which must be filled each year.
- After receiving and discussing the report of the interview committee, the College would either proceed to the election or direct to the committee to obtain additional information or to give further advice on individual candidates.

- If the report of the interview committee were returned to the committee by the College, the committee would meet within seven days of the receipt of its returned report. It would then submit a new report to the College that might contain names previously suggested and/or additional names.
- The College would then hold the election of alumni governors by secret ballot.

Through this proposed refinement, the College would continue to contribute strongly to the evaluation process and reserve the final decision with respect to the election of alumni governors.

I have outlined three possible motions below which I would like to ask the College to consider. Motion 2 was suggested by some members at the coffee meetings, and I understand that it is technically feasible. However, it is important to consider whether or not this approach would address the primary concerns raised by applicants and whether it would help to improve the existing process.

**Motion 1:**

Be it recommended that the College of Electors approve:

THAT authority to conduct interviews of candidates for alumni members of Governing Council be delegated to the Executive Committee of the College of Electors and two co-opted members of the College, effective immediately.

**Motion 2:**

Be it recommended that the College of Electors approve:

THAT authority to conduct interviews of candidates for alumni members of Governing Council be delegated to the Executive Committee of the College of Electors and two co-opted members of the College, effective immediately. The interviews will be broadcast by live video to the remaining members of the College, who will be located in a room separate from that in which the interviews are held.

**Motion 3:**

Be it recommended that the College of Electors approve:

THAT the full College of Electors continue to conduct interviews of candidates for alumni members of Governing Council.

I look forward to a full discussion of the College on this matter at our meeting on September 24, 2009. If you would like to contact me before then, please feel free to send an email to Mae-Yu Tan at [maeyu.tan@utoronto.ca](mailto:maeyu.tan@utoronto.ca), who will forward it to me.

Thank you.