

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

REPORT NUMBER 90 OF THE UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS BOARD

February 1, 2000

To the Governing Council,
University of Toronto.

Your Board reports that it held a special meeting on Tuesday, February 1, 2000, at 5:00 p.m. in the Board Room, Simcoe Hall, at which the following were present:

Mr. Brian C. Burchell (In the Chair)
Ms Nancy L. Watson (Vice-Chair)
Professor J. Robert S. Prichard, President
Professor Ian Orchard, Vice-Provost, Students
Ms Susan Addario, Director,
Student Affairs
Professor Ethel Auster
Dr. Robert Bennett
Ms Margaret Hancock
Professor Bruce Kidd
Professor Ian R. McDonald
Ms Mary Ann Pilskalnetis
Ms Wendy Talfourd-Jones

Ms Sally Walker

Non-Voting Members:

Mr. Louis R. Charpentier, Secretary of the
Governing Council
Ms Marilyn Van Norman, Director, Student
Services

Secretariat:

Ms Margaret McKone

Regrets:

The Honourable William G. Davis
Dr. Shari Graham Fell
Mr. Vivek Krishnamurthy
Dr. Heather Lane
Ms Alicia Maund

Mr. Ahmed Rafi Mian
Mr. Jonathan Papoulidis
Ms Rosie Parnass
Mr. Kashif S. Pirzada
Mr. Robert G. Spencer

In Attendance:

Professor John Mayhall, Chair, the Academic Board, and member, the Elections Committee
Mr. Elan Ohayon, member, the Governing Council
Mr. Jim Delaney, Manager, Liaison and Campus Life Services, Office of Student Affairs
Ms Susan Girard, Chief Returning Officer, Governing Council Elections, and Assistant
Secretary of the Governing Council
Mr. Paul Kutasi, Vice-President, Students' Administrative Council
Ms Manon Le Paven, President, Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students
Mr. Eugene Siciunas, Director, Computing and Networking Services
Dr. Eva Swenson, Director, Student Information Systems

Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman thanked members for attending the special meeting of the Board. He noted that the start time of the meeting had been changed to 5:00 p.m. to accommodate many members who had indicated they were unavailable to attend the meeting earlier in the day.

1. Report of the Previous Meeting

Report Number 89 of the University Affairs Board (January 11, 2000) was approved.

2. Election Guidelines for 2000 - Introduction of Web-based Voting

(a) Introduction

The Chair recalled that following much discussion at the previous meeting, the Committee had adjourned debate on the following motion concerning the introduction of web-based voting.

THAT the 2000 election for undergraduate student representatives on Governing Council be conducted by web-based voting.

THAT the Election Guidelines 2000, dated December 9, 1999, as amended, a copy of which is attached to Report Number 19 of the Elections Committee as Appendix "A", be approved.

This motion was now before the Committee.

Invited to comment, the Chair of the Elections Committee, Ms Wendy Talfourd-Jones, noted that following the January meeting of the Board, the Secretariat had considered the concerns raised by members with respect to the proposal for web-based voting. Mr. Charpentier's memorandum to the Executive Committee outlined the actions that had since been taken with respect to consultation, security, accessibility and profile. His memorandum also outlined an alternative proposal for undergraduate student voting this year which combined both web-based and ballot-box voting.

Ms Talfourd-Jones continued that the Elections Committee had met on January 27 to consider the new proposal. Representatives from the Students' Administrative Council had been present. Representatives from the Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students and the Arts and Science Students Union had also been invited but had been unable to attend. The Elections Committee recommended that the alternative proposal be approved for this year. Students would have a choice of voting on the web or voting at the usual Governing Council / SAC polling stations.

The motion on the table was withdrawn at the request of the mover and seconder. No objection was raised.

On motion duly moved and seconded,

It was proposed

THAT the 2000 election for undergraduate student representatives on Governing Council be conducted by a combination of web-based and ballot-box voting.

THAT the Election Guidelines 2000, amended to reflect this change, dated January 27, 2000, attached hereto as Appendix "A", be approved.

2. *Election Guidelines for 2000 - Introduction of Web-based Voting* (cont'd)

(b) Discussion

The Chairman welcomed the following guests to the meeting: Ms Susan Girard, Chief Returning Officer, Governing Council Elections; Dr. Eva Swenson, Director, Student Information Systems; and Mr. Eugene Siciunas, Director, Computing and Networking Services.

A member noted that many of the Board's student members were not in attendance. She asked whether student members had received notification of the meeting. The Board Secretary responded that members of the Board had received notice of the special meeting via e-mail, where members had email addresses, by fax, where members had fax numbers, as well as by regular mail. As well, all members had been phoned when the decision to change the start time of the meeting had been made. She was aware of at least two student members who were absent but who had indicated to her that they would be in attendance. The Chair noted that the Board's Vice-Chair, who was in attendance, was a student member. As well, one of the Board's student members sat on the Elections Committee and had endorsed the proposal in that forum.

A member of the Governing Council addressed the new proposal. He noted that he had attended the January 27 meeting of the Elections Committee at which there had been much discussion of the Board's previous concerns. A modified proposal had been brought forward; however, he believed that technical, privacy and social issues remained to be resolved. The issue of web-based voting had arisen two years ago, at which time the Graduate Students' Union and others had expressed concerns. He was concerned that the proposal to introduce web-based voting was being rushed through governance with little appreciation for what was at stake and with a lack of recognition that people were perturbed by the prospect of web-based voting. He believed that the technical concerns had not been adequately addressed. The point of a democratic society was that there was an anonymous election process. This was something that should be cherished.

The member of the Governing Council then addressed the process for approval of the revised motion, noting that the January 27 meeting of the Elections Committee and today's special meeting of the Board had been set up in haste. As well, while not a member, he had not been provided with notice of either meeting.

He continued that there were technical issues relating to the proposal. While it had been suggested that the elections process would be secure, he did not believe this to be true. It was important that the voting process be transparent and verifiable. This was not the case given that the database of student records and the record of voting were to be stored on the same mainframe.

The member suggested that members would not endorse a proposal by the federal or provincial governments to conduct elections by web-based voting because there would be no way to verify who had voted and whether there had been tampering with the system.

In conclusion, the member noted that the proposal before the Board had been suggested as a compromise. However, it did not make sense to offer both ballot-box and web-based voting to address security and technical concerns related to web-based voting. While the proposal might in fact lead to a higher participation rate in the elections, he did not think it was worth the risk given that democracy would be sacrificed.

At the invitation of the Chair, Mr. Eugene Siciunas, Director, Computing and Networking Services, addressed the issue of security for web-based voting.

2. *Election Guidelines for 2000 - Introduction of Web-based Voting* (cont'd)

He clarified that the verification of voters would be undertaken by the Repository of Student Information System (ROSI), an automated student records system at the University. The ROSI system ran under the MVS operating system on an IBM Mainframe computer. MVS had been in development for over 20 years, and was very well-established and secure. This system was used also by banks and financial institutions for the protection of data. He was not aware of any penetration of the system during its use by the University. As well, the University was a participant in regular meetings of a worldwide group of users who shared experiences with use and development of the system. There had been no indication within this group that the system had ever been penetrated by hackers. Therefore, he had a great deal of confidence in the system. He also noted that access to the ROSI system was restricted to authorized users (e.g. registrars and administrators), who were required to use an identification card and one-time-only passwords. There were very tight security procedures in place to ensure that unauthorized users could not obtain access to the system.

He continued that the web server for accessing ROSI resided on a private network, which was connected to the Internet through a separate machine configured as a firewall. This firewall controlled access to the web server and would prevent unauthorized access to the student record database.

When a student logged into the web server, his/her data was encrypted with a 40 or 128 bit key (depending upon the capability of the student's browser), so that it could not be easily read by hackers. This encryption protected the confidentiality of the student's data while it was in transit between the University's server and the student's browser.

A member noted that at the January 27 meeting of the Elections Committee, it had been suggested that staff at the University of Western Ontario should be consulted about their experience with web-based voting. Specifically, concerns had been raised about the likelihood of a student within a residence coercing fellow colleagues to cast votes on his/her computer for a preferred candidate. Ms Girard responded that she had been in touch with her counterpart at the University of Western Ontario. That person had received no complaints or negative feedback about the web-based voting, which had been in place for one year. Participation rates in elections at Western had increased only slightly with the introduction of web-based voting. Web-based voting had been introduced at Western for the Board and Senate elections. Student societies were planning also to adopt web-based voting for their elections.

The member of the Governing Council responded that firewalls did not guarantee that a system would not be breached; rather, they simply reduced the risk. For example, a hacker had recently penetrated a computer system at NASA. He argued that the student database, which contained students' academic records, should not be stored on the same mainframe that would be used by students to cast votes. This posed a very serious risk. The member suggested that rather than rush through a proposal for web-based voting, the Governing Council continue the current system of ballot-box voting. Further exploration of web-based voting could then be undertaken.

The vote was taken on the motion.
The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Secretary
February 1, 2000

Chair