The Physics and Astronomy Students' Association
Election Norms

Ratified June 14, 2021

1 Introduction and Disclaimer

The purpose of this document is to outline the standards set for PASA elections. These strategies and procedures have been successful in the past and many are generally accepted and expected by the population, with additions from the publicly formed Elections Norms Committee which formed to address discrepancies or holes noticed by the public. The guidelines in this document are just that: guidelines. They are not binding like the constitution is, however they are expected to be followed whenever possible and effective to do so. In the event that there is something in this document that contradicts what is contained within PASA's constitution as these two documents may not be updated perfectly in parallel as time goes on, the constitution takes authority.

2 Candidate Conduct

As all PASA members are, candidates in any PASA election or appointment proceeding are bound to the rules of the code of conduct. Candidates are expected to act with integrity in all election proceedings and in discussions with or about other candidates during the election period. Expectations for appropriate candidate conduct and conduct of members towards the candidates include, but are not limited to, the conditions described below.

As a candidate you are expected to hold yourself to a certain level of professionalism in your interactions with and in discussion of the other candidates, meaning you are expected to model respect and our code of conduct. Criticisms of opponents should be kept to their platform, speech, and professional characteristics that will impact their ability to fulfill their role (such as the ability to critique code of conduct violations, negative interactions with department members, etc). Criticisms are not to be directed at another candidate's personal characteristics that will not clearly and directly impact their ability to fulfill the role (personality, gender, sexuality, disabilities, etc). Candidates' criticisms of opponents' platform should be kept out of official PASA spaces, with the exception of the debates. Small group discussions outside of PASA spaces are not recommended due to the lack of moderation, but are permitted.

It is required by the constitution that candidates are not allowed to campaign in official PASA spaces, unless otherwise explicitly stated by the Chief Returning Officers (CRO). Though this firm restriction does not apply to members who are not running in the election, they are strongly discouraged from campaigning for a candidate within PASA spaces.

For research purposes, candidates and potential candidates are allowed to ask outgoing or previous executives for input on their platform and information about the structure of the role of interest. This is to gain insight into the role and not a platform for candidates to promote themselves. To approach the general member population for feedback, it must be done outside of official PASA spaces. This is to prevent surveying of the general PASA population from bordering on campaigning.

All members are expected to be respectful of candidates' professional schedules (classes, work, committee meetings, etc) and are not to approach them to speak on election matters while they are engaged in professional activities and/or responsibilities.

3   Executive Elections

3.1   Timeline

Elections for PASA Executives (voting members of the Executive Council) are typically held annually in March. Key events in this process are the appointment of the CRO, election sign up start and end dates, the debates, and the set voting period. The sign up sheet is typically posted in an official PASA space at the beginning of a week and is taken down after 10 full business days. The last day to sign up is traditionally the last day of the week preceding the debates. Typically, at the end of March, PASA hosts the official election debates, lead and moderated by the CRO. Voting is open for 24 hours and begins immediately after the debates close. Debates are typically held in the evening and advertised well in advance to ensure candidates and interested members are able to make it. The day after voting closes, election results are distributed in two ways: with the names of the new executive over email, and the election results with vote counts in an official and visible PASA space. Election results posted in official PASA spaces with vote counts should be removed after a few days to maintain morale and out of respect for those who lost.

3.2   Debates

The debates are the only time that candidates are permitted engage in public back and forth, consisting of question, answer, and rebuttal. Debates are grouped by role and the CRO decides which order to run through the roles, though it is strongly recommended that the President goes last to minimize scheduling conflicts for voters and candidates for the debate. A common order is Internal, Communications, Events, Finance, Academic, then President, but scheduling conflicts may pose a need to deviate from this. Each portion of the debate begins with the CRO posing 1-2 prepared questions to all candidates for a given role, where every candidate pertaining to a given role is asked the same questions from the CRO. After candidates have the opportunity to respond to their opponents' answers, the floor opens up for audience questions.

Audience members may pose questions to all candidates of a given role, or direct their question to a specific candidate. The CRO will select interested audience members to ask their questions, and should do so on a first come first serve basis. If there is an overwhelming number of questions for a given role, then questions from audience members who have not yet asked a question during the debate as a whole yet should be prioritized. If the CRO deems an audience question inappropriate or unfair, they have the right to block the question, meaning the candidate(s) will not provide an answer. Candidates should pause before answering a question to allow the CRO a chance to exercise this right if necessary.

In the past, in the event that a candidate was unable to make the debates they could have someone read their speech for them, and have questions for them directed to them later. However, this lead to the person they chose to read their speech for them answering questions in their place at the debates, and also prevents candidates from posing questions to their opponents in a public setting. It is recommended that the evening debate time is continued to avoid time conflicts for candidates.

3.3   Voting

As stated in the constitution, all current members who purchased their membership prior to March 1 of that club year are eligible to vote. From March 1 onward, current executives should be noting on the membership sheet that any newly joined members will not be eligible to vote. Voting opens for 24 hours, commencing at the end of the debates. The expected voting period start and end times must be clearly communicated to all members before the debates, and official voting period communicated after the debates have finished.

3.3.1 Paper Ballots

Paper ballots are the current standard for hosting elections in person. There is one voting station in PASA and members are only able to vote when an official polling manager is present. Polling managers consist of the CRO and members of the outgoing executive team who are not running in the current election. Though the outgoing executive team appoints the polling managers, the CRO reserves the right to deny a person put forth by the executive team under reasonable grounds. Polling managers must be decided before the ballots are made available.

Polling managers are responsible for confirming the membership of all voters and crossing them off a list once they have voted to ensure everyone is only voting a maximum of one time. Membership can be confirmed by presenting the polling manager with your membership card for that club year, or if an individual does not have their card with them, they can provide their unicard that has both their name and UCID on it so that information can be cross referenced with the current membership sheet.

If all polling managers together are not able to cover the entirety of the standard school day during the voting period (defined as 8:00 am to 8:00 pm to accommodate lab times), then they are encouraged to release an expected schedule before the voting period starts of when at least one of them will be present so members can vote. It is standard for the in-person voting to be open for at least 1 hour after the debates end.

3.3.2 Digital Ballots

While operating online, a google form was used to collect votes. This was done two ways in two separate years: one by not collecting UCIDs as part of the vote, and one doing so. By not collecting UCIDs, voter anonymity was maintained, however there was no way to confirm voter eligibility or prove that each voter only submitted one vote. In collecting UCIDs, only the CRO was able to access that information so though voters identity was revealed to the CRO, anonymity was maintained to every other member and all candidates. The CRO exclusively used this information to confirm voter eligibility and verify that every voter only did so once.

In using this system, no polling managers other than the CRO are used and it allows for members to vote at any time during the voting period without the need for the presence of a polling manager to verify their membership at the time of voting.

3.3.3 Voting by Proxy

The constitution gives members the right to vote in executive elections by proxy. The option to vote by proxy and the requirements/procedure to do so must be clearly communicated to the public within a reasonable window that allows them to exercise that right.

3.4 CRO and Polling Manager Conduct

The CRO is the authority on election matters, and thus it is important that they act without bias and in a trustworthy and respectful manner. Though PASA is full of memes and fun, the CRO is a serious role and must be treated as such, especially when carrying out official duties and during the voting period.

While the debates are in session, it is crucial that the CRO remains impartial. In the interest of integrity and professionalism on the part of the CRO and polling managers, and to respect the voting period and what an influential time it is, it is strongly recommended that individuals in both roles acknowledge their power and influence by refraining from publicly

voicing their opinions on the candidates during the voting period. A comment on the quality of a candidate from a polling manager during the voting period or as someone is about to vote can have a strong influence on swaying an individual's opinion and must be acknowledged. While any general population member may voice their opinion on a candidate during the voting period, it is an abuse of power by the CRO and other polling managers to do so.

3.5 Campaigning

As stated in the constitution, campaigning is not permitted within official PASA spaces. Campaigning in private year chats outside of the PASA discord server is allowed, however anything resembling a formal debate such as candidates posing election related questions and answers to each other in a group setting is not permitted.

4 Representative Elections

4.1 Election Structure

Both Year Representatives and Degree Representatives are elected annually at the fall Annual General Meeting (AGM), occurring in September. Typically, the election of Year Representatives is done first, in numerical order by year, followed by the election of the Degree Representative if applicable. In person, each Representative candidate is asked to give a 30 second speech on why they want the role and why they feel they are a good fit. Voting is then done by a show of hands of eligible members. Currently there is no system in place for verifying voter eligibility for these elections other than the usual checking of memberships at the door, and executives watching those with raised hands and checking for people whose year and/or major they know by heart.

4.2 Online Representative Elections

While PASA was operating online, the election for First Year Representative required interested members to register with the President, where their name and a 250 word maximum speech was then posted by the President to a channel in the PASA discord server where members could not send messages. Candidate registration and speech submission (both as requirements to run) were due 1 hour before the AGM started. At the AGM, candidates present read out their speeches, though attendance was not required for candidates as it is in person. After this round of speeches finished, voting opened for 24 hours. Eligible members voted by "reacting" to the speech of the candidate of their choice in the previously mentioned discord channel. It was communicated to members that if they voted for more than one candidate that all of their votes for the role would be void. This was done because we had a large number of out of province and international students, and wanted to ensure those who were interested in the role or wanted a say in the election, but could not make the AGM due to time zone conflicts had the opportunity to run and vote. The election of all further representatives was conducted the same way as done in person, as described above.

4.3 First Year Representative Promotion

The existence of and opportunity to run for First Year Representative is typically advertised in PHYS 227 during the first week of classes when members of the executive team visit the class to promote PASA. This is usually done by two people, and when class schedules allow, it is done by the President and the outgoing First Year Representative. However, substitutions of which members of the executive team go may be made if necessary.

5   Webmaster Appointment

There are currently no consistently established norms for the appointment of Webmaster, how the executive team has chosen to appoint them has varied year to year. Simply put, the Webmaster is appointed by the executive team without a public election but all members are eligible to apply for consideration. How the nominations for Webmaster are processed and what information candidates must provide is up to the discretion of the current executive team. Webmaster does not have cut and dry dates for the start and end of their term, but more closely follows the schedule of the executives than the representatives.