

# 2013 Election Committee Report

## Summary

The 2013 GSG Referendum and Officer Election was held from Thursday 28 February to Wednesday 6 March. Participation in the election was excellent - 1213 students voted out of 2573 who were eligible, a participation rate of just over 47%. This is more than double the average turnout over the past 6 elections (574).

The results of the elections are as follows:

1. The referendum question was approved - receiving the support of 911 students (79.9% of non-abstaining students, and 35.4% of all eligible voters)
2. The following candidates were successful in contests for officer positions:
  - President - Friederike Funk
  - Vice President - Kyle Keller
  - Communications Director - Rachael Barry
  - Secretary - Julia Wittes
  - Special Events Chair - Shane Blackman

There were no candidates for the position of Treasurer.

The election ran smoothly. No complaints or concerns were brought to the attention of the Election Committee - and accordingly we recommend that the GSG Assembly certify the election results.

The remainder of this report provides a more detailed account of the election process, including a full vote count, and suggestions for future elections.

## Pre-Election

The election was run according to the plan approved by the GSG Assembly at the January 2013 meeting.

*Nominations.* The deadline for nominations was Monday 4 March. 25 students were nominated in total - some for multiple positions. Most students were nominated by other students, although there were some self-nominations as well. Each position had at least 4 nominees (President - 4, Vice President - 7, Communications Director - 8, Secretary - 9, Treasurer - 5, Special Events Chair - 4). 8 candidates accepted their nominations. The positions of President, Vice-President and Secretary were uncontested. 3 students contested the position of Communications Director, and 2 students contested the position of Special Events Chair. No nominations were accepted for the position of Treasurer,

*Statements.* All candidates submitted appropriate statements to the Election Committee by the Tuesday 12 March deadline. The Election Committee recommended that all statements be accepted without alteration - and the GSG Assembly unanimously accepted this recommendation at its February meeting. The

Election Committee drafted a neutral information statement regarding the referendum question, and the Executive Committee drafted a statement supporting the referendum. Since the Assembly unanimously supported the referendum at its December meeting, a ‘No’ committee was not formed to write a statement in opposition. The Executive Committee invited any Assembly member to draft a such a statement, but none was submitted. Accordingly, no statement against the referendum question appeared in the information packet distributed to students.

*‘Meet the Candidates’ Forum.* The ‘Meet the Candidates’ forum was held on Wednesday 20 March. The forum followed the procedure adopted in 2012. Candidates were first invited to give a short (3 minute) statement - with candidates in contested elections speaking first. The forum then adjourned for refreshments during which time attendees were invited to submit questions to the moderator on index cards that were provided. A Q&A session followed. This procedure had the dual benefits of allowing candidates to chat informally with students after first having had the chance to publicly introduce themselves, and to provide a less intimidating way for students to ask questions of the candidates. Election Committee felt that this procedure worked very well and recommend its continued use in the future.

### **The Election**

*Election Software.* The election was conducted online using the University Survey Facility (which allows for authentication of user using their Princeton netid and password). The web survey does not currently have a mobile site, but the web-version nevertheless worked well on various tablets and cell phones. The Election Committee did not encounter any problems with the software.

*Reminder Emails.* The Election Committee departed from the terms of the election plan in one respect - rather than send 3 separate reminder emails to all students - we decided instead to only send reminders to students who had not yet voted. Given the departure from the approved procedures, we informed the Assembly and all candidates about our intentions, and only received positive feedback. We encourage future Election Committees to adopt this procedure.

*Eligible Voters.* All current Princeton graduate students who had paid their annual dues were eligible to participate in the election. This included all regularly enrolled students and DCE students, whose dues are automatically collected by the Graduate School. According to the Graduate School’s records, there were 2573 regularly enrolled or DCE students on the day before polls opened. There were no ETDCC students, or students on leave who voluntarily paid their \$10 fee.

It was brought to the Committee’s attention that a student who had defended their thesis was able to vote. Our understanding of the situation is as follows: The University continues to consider a person to be a student until the end of the month in which they defend their thesis. (If the defence is in May, then the student retains their student status until the end of June.) Hence, any student who defended in the month of February would be eligible to vote when the polls opened on February 28. (Technically they would cease to be eligible from the second day of voting onwards.) For practical reasons, we believe it is most

sensible to take the list of eligible voters as those who were eligible on the day-of/day-before voting commences. Future Election Committees may wish to avoid this problem by scheduling the election entirely within the month of March - although this may not always be feasible given that the election must conclude several days before the March Assembly meeting. (Note also that this problem can arise for a variety of other reasons - e.g. a student may withdraw from his/her program half way into the voting period.)

*Strategic Abstention.* The Committee became aware that some students had decided to not vote to prevent the referendum from achieving a quorum - and were encouraging their peers to not vote. The Committee would make two comments:

1. Such voters were mistaken about their strategic incentives. To pass (i) 60% of those voting must vote yes, and (ii) 1/3 of all students must vote yes. Voting "no" makes the referendum less likely to meet the first criterion, and has no effect on the outcome in terms of the second criterion. Hence, there was actually a strict incentive for students to sincerely vote their preference.
2. Notwithstanding their mistaken understanding, we were disappointed that students would choose to cause the referendum to fail on a technicality - rather their voting their preference and letting the democratic outcome prevail. We recommend that the GSG avoid quorum requirements of this sort in the future.

## **Referendum**

Pursuant to the unanimous decision of the GSG Assembly at its December 2012 meeting, the following referendum question was put to the student body:

*The GSG proposes to set the GSG fee at \$15 for the 2013-14 Academic Year and to have the fee increase by the same proportion as the University Fellowship (usually about 3%) in subsequent years. Do you support this proposal?*

To succeed, the referendum required the support of 60% of students voting, and one-third of all eligible voters. In this election, the latter requirement translated to a quorum requirement of 858 'yes' votes.

## **Results**

The total number of eligible voters (as reported by the Graduate School) was 2573. Quorum for officer elections was 258 votes (10% of eligible voters). Quorum was met for each officer position. The election for a particular office is considered void if either quorum is not met or if there are no candidates. The only void election was that for Treasurer. An individual candidate was disqualified if the number of votes they received was fewer than the number of votes to "Disapprove" or "Disapprove All Candidates". No candidates were disqualified.

In the lists below, the percentages in parentheses indicate the proportion of votes received by the candidate/option, excluding abstentions.

**Referendum**

Yes - 909 (79.9%)

No - 229 (20.1%)

Abstain - 75

Total - 1213

*Referendum Passed*

**President**

Friederike Funk - 781 (94.9%)

Disapprove - 42 (5.1%)

Abstain - 353

Total - 1176

*Friederike Funk elected*

**Vice President**

Kyle Keller - 781 (93.0%)

Disapprove - 59 (7.0%)

Abstain - 329

Total - 1169

*Kyle Keller elected*

**Communications Director**

Rachel Barry - 435 (56.4%)

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs - 190 (24.6%)

Thomas Morrell - 124 (16.1%)

Disapprove all candidates - 22 (2.9%)

Abstain - 392

Total - 1163

*Rachael Barry elected*

**Secretary**

Julia Wittes - 804 (96.1%)

Disapprove - 33 (3.9%)

Abstain - 324

Total - 1161

*Julia Wittes elected*

**Special Events Chair**

Quentin Berthet - 254 (32.8%)

Shane Blackman - 490 (63.2%)

Disapprove all candidates - 31 (4%)

Abstain - 378

Total - 1153

*Shane Blackman elected*