

## UTGSU Civics Committee Legislative Program Report

*Report from Sept. 2014 – April 2015*

*Drafted by Susanne Waldorf, Civics and Environment Commissioner and Civics Committee Chair  
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### **Overview**

For our Legislative Program, the Civics Committee had identified four broad areas of focus for the 2014-2015 year. They were: the promotion of the Federal Elections in October 2015, improving voter turn-out for UTGSU Executive Elections, accessibility to the UTGSU, and promoting off-campus volunteerism. The committee has been low in numbers all year long with our largest attendance in September with 5 students present and our lowest number at 3 attendees in several other months. We did not hold a meeting in December because people were too busy with academic work and travels or in March because people were too busy with the CUPE 3902 strike. At our January meeting we re-evaluated our capacity and decided to focus on how to improve voter turn-out at the UTGSU Executive Committee elections and Referenda. We also decided to start work on how to promote the Federal Elections after the UTGSU Executive Committee elections and Referenda.

In September and October, we spent much of our time together working on promotion of the municipal elections with graduate students (something that was on the 2013-2014 Legislative Program for the Civics Committee). We held an international student mock vote (online) and a Get-out-the-Vote party on Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>. In all, there were 42 international graduate students that voted and the mock vote was semi-successful. The party had very low turn-out. We also created a one-page elections “cheat sheet” about the top mayoral candidates so that graduate students could go to the polls with some quick information about what the top mayoral candidates stood for. We did not have a mechanism to evaluate how useful this was.

In terms of our Legislative program for 2014-2015, we have been able to accomplish very little of what we had proposed. Here are the highlights:

### **Improving Voter Turnout for UTGSU Executive Elections and Referenda**

We created posters to help promote nominations for the Executive Committee elections. These posters were distributed around campus and posted on the UTGSU facebook page. Once candidates were declared, we contacted them and asked them to answer three questions in 35 words or less that we identified as priority for graduate students; these questions were about funding/tuition fees, mental health, and student-supervisor relationships. We compiled these answers into flyers which we made available through the UTGSU facebook page. We also hired 5 Elections Promoters to stand outside polling stations on elections days to encourage graduate students to vote. They handed out the flyers that we had created (which also had a list of the location of all the polling stations and the times they were open on the back). One other thing we did around the UTGSU Executive Elections and referenda was to host a campaign planning party for the candidates and the referenda groups. The intention was to encourage candidates to campaign with the idea that the more candidates promote

themselves, the more voter turnout would improve. In the end, the party was not used as a space for campaign planning, but those who attended still found it to be a nice space to start getting to know other candidates.

Through our efforts and perhaps because of the circumstances surrounding the timing of the Elections (during the CUPE 3902 strike), we increased voter turn-out by approximately 100 people from last year's election.

### **Promotion of Federal Elections**

We have yet to begin our promotions for the Federal elections, but there are plans to begin this over the summer months.

### **Accessibility to the UTGSU**

We were unable to accomplish anything related to accessibility to the UTGSU this year.

### **Promoting Off Campus Volunteerism**

We were unable to accomplish this part of our Legislative Program.

### **Recommendations for the Civics Committee from the Civics and Environment Commissioner**

In my 2 years as Civics and Environment Commissioner, the Civics Committee has been one of the lower capacity committees, with even those who are appointed by Council at the April meetings being unable to sustain their involvement throughout the year. As such, we have accomplished just a few things each year (in 2013-14 we developed a short introductory video on post-residency fees and in 2014-15 we did a lot of work with Executive elections promotion). In the future I would suggest that the Civics Committee put forward a Legislative Program which focuses on one area of interest to the committee and that the committee is open to responding to other issues which arise during General Council meetings or at the AGM.

Ultimately, committee work garners more interest when there is a specific focus of the committee. Choosing one area of primary focus at the beginning of the year will help the committee chair to recruit those graduate students who are interested in that particular project and to potentially make a greater impact in that particular area. I would encourage General Council members to provide input into what that area of focus should be in the lead-up to defining the Legislative Program. Perhaps General Council members could ask their course unions what they would like the Civics Committee do during the year and this could be reported during the Sept. General Council meeting.