

2024 GSA General Election

CRO Decision in the Matter of the Computing Science Graduate Students' Association (CSGSA) and Soumya Kulal
Sunday, February 24th, 2024

A formal complaint was filed by the Computing Science Graduate Students' Association (CSGSA) (hereafter "the Complainant"), against Soumya Kulal, a candidate for the position of Vice-President Academic (hereafter "the Respondent"), on Friday, February 23rd, 2024.

Complaint: The complaint has several components:

1. The Respondent emailed the Complainant asking to meet and indicated they were "part of the GSA", which the Complainant understood as they were a current DEO.
2. The Respondent messaged the Complainant on Slack after an email correspondence and pressured the CSGSA to promote them.
3. The Respondent disrupted CSGSA's work while they were distributing confidential information to CS graduate students and sent an email to the entire CS department where they stated they are running for GSA VP Academic, to which another graduate student responded to let CSGSA know about it.
4. The Respondent promoted their campaign materials through Slack.

Response: The response to each complaint is as follows:

1. The Respondent acknowledges that they should have clarified they were a candidate for a GSA VP position, and not currently "part of GSA". They stated this was a typo and apologized for their error, and after this, they always used "candidate" in their communications.
2. The Respondent had "no intentions of asking for promotion". They wanted to meet the CSGSA in-person because the President does not know them as a person and took this as an indication they want to meet with the Respondent.
3. The Respondent emailed the CSGSA back on the same email chain so that they did not miss the previous email inquiries. The Respondent states it was not broadcasted to CSGSA as a whole.
4. The Respondent provided an email from CSGSA allowing them to campaign through their Slack, but that they would not endorse them.

Relevant Bylaw and Policy:

I.BYL. 1.1 The fundamental principle underlying GSA elections is that they are to be fair, respect the wishes of voters, and conducted in a manner that reflects the excellent, positive reputation of the GSA.

I.POL. 10.10.b Candidates will circulate campaign materials through email only to their personal contacts and will not utilize moderated mailing lists.

I.POL. 10.10.b.i Campaign materials circulated either to or from a University of Alberta email address to personal contacts will require the approval of the CRO.

Consultation with the Elections and Referenda Committee (ERC): The CRO, DRO, and ERC created pre-determined guidelines for issuing penalties for violating each campaign rule before the campaign period began. The CRO reached out to ERC and recommended using

the pre-determined penalties for violating each bylaw, as I.POL.10.10.b and I.POL.10.10.b.i are relatively straightforward, and I.BYL.1.1 is up to interpretation, but a similar situation occurred in a previous election, so it would be fair to impose the same consequence. Members of ERC recommended total penalties ranging from 20% to 30% with some discussion around the severity of pressuring the CSGSA for an endorsement, as well as misleading the CSGSA by stating they are a “part of the GSA”.

Decision: The CRO decision, considering each complaint and response, is as follows:

1. All graduate students are technically part of the GSA; however, we would normally introduce ourselves as a “graduate student” rather than “part of the GSA”. It is reasonable to believe that the candidate misled the CSGSA into thinking they were already a Directly Elected Officer or somehow affiliated with the GSA beyond just being a registered graduate student by stating this. A 2% vote deduction is being assigned to this component of the complaint.
2. Although the Respondent stated they had “no intentions of asking for promotion”, the screenshot of the Slack messages clearly shows that the Respondent wanted clarification about why CSGSA would not be endorsing them. Further, the Respondent continues the conversation after the CSGSA representative communicates that they have “no obligation to respond to this request further”. A similar case occurred in previous elections that resulted in a 15% vote deduction. As we determined this case is slightly less severe, a 10% vote deduction is being assigned. These actions do not reflect the excellent, positive reputation of the GSA if our candidates have made other people feel uncomfortable and pressured into something.
3. The Respondent claims they did not send the email that states “I’m standing for GSA VP Academic” to their entire department; however, the proof from the Complainant where another student reached out to them proves this is not the case. The email was also sent both to and from ualberta email addresses, which requires approval of the CRO, which was not obtained. ERC has pre-approved a 5% penalty for using mailing lists and 5% for not having emails to and from ualberta email addresses approved by the CRO. A total of a 10% vote deduction was given for this complaint.
4. Campaign materials shared through social media and similar channels such as Slack do not need to be approved by the CRO. In addition, the Respondent has permission from the President of the CSGSA to post in their Slack channel. This complaint was determined to be unfounded and did not result in any penalties.

The overall decision is the candidate receiving a 22% vote deduction.

Appeals: As per GSA Bylaw and Policy, “decisions of the CRO are subject to appeal to the GSA Appeals and Complaints Board (GSA ACB)” (I.POL.11.6) and “[parties] have twenty-four (24) hours from the time the CRO’s email is deemed delivered for an emailed appeal to be received by the Chair of the GSA ACB” (I.POL.11.6.a).