

Position Report

Name: Franklin Fezeu
Position: Elections Officer
Term: Summer 2007

Responsibilities

Prepare a schedule, in accordance with the constitution, for the upcoming elections to be approved by the council. Propose a set of rules, in accordance with the constitution, that has to be approved by council and outlining the details of the electoral process. Determine the operational details of the elections, like the mode of nominations and the electoral software to be used (should also get council approval for that, although council is likely to approve recommendation). Overall, ensure that the elections are held in a timely and civil manner.

Performance during the term

- Nomination & Voting Scripts
 - Society had some scripts lying around to handle voting. Most likely they have not been widely used in recent elections because it wasn't easy to update them with new information every time.
 - I decided to write new Nomination & Voting scripts based on the functionalities discovered in the old scripts. The major improvement was to eliminate the need for future Elections Officers to have to go and modify the script every time there was an election.
 - Data files have been introduced to hold the required information at every step of the process. All the files are generated by the various scripts and as such can be deleted once the results of the election are published. The only file that is always present in the system holds the details about the positions and is used by both the Nomination & Voting scripts at various degrees.

- The scripts have all been placed inside one folder named “Election_files” along with the file containing all the positions.

- **Electoral process**

- Before a new election is held, the Election Officer has to delete all the files that were generated during the previous elections (details to follow in another documentation addressed to the Next Election Officer) and a copy of the positions’ file is to be sent to the root of the scripter account. In case of a by-election in which only a subset of the positions is open, the copy of the positions’ file has to be modified accordingly to reflect the correct positions that are open (details to follow in another documentation addressed to the Next Election Officer).

- During the electoral process, some flaws have been pointed out by some people and I have done my best to address them in a timely manner. Unfortunately at the time I am writing this report, there are still some flaws that need to be addressed (more details in the suggestions section). I strongly recommend that we address those flaws because they have a destructive potential that cannot be ignored.

- Nominations were conducted following two modes: using the script and using a paper based version. Both the script and the paper based version are located in the “Election_files” folder. Students were allowed to nominate as many people as they wished for any of the positions. I have since proposed an amendment to that rule (more details in the suggestions section).

- Voting was performed exclusively using the voting script on the E.O.’s account and, as suggested earlier, some flaws still remained to be addressed in order to make that script effectively airtight.

Possible Improvements and Suggestions for Incoming E.O.

There is still much that is left to be done on the voting script. There has been much talk over the subject and I have summarized here what I think are the feasible solutions.

1. We can use Ian Campbell's approach to a solution by implementing a break between the recording of information and the storing of information. I have already asked him to submit a sample code or a template of that critical section in order to help us improve the process. I believe that since he was skilled enough to find the flaws, it should follow that he has the necessary competences to address those flaws. Of course if we can find someone else to implement those changes, it will be good as well. At the time I am writing this he has not accepted to write the fixes that he is proposing and that we need.
2. Mike Smit has proposed that we can use his online software (free of charge) to run the Voting process of the election. Although it is a good idea and an excellent initiative, there are two factors that we have to consider:
 - a. The software is installed on a remote server and in order for us to run our elections we have to rely on that remote server and send out our data. Numerous issues of privacy were brought up during this election and sending out our data only increases the risk of having private data leaked to the public. Although Mike is said to have a privacy agreement with Dal, we have no guarantee that a third party will not, by various means, obtain that data against Mike's best efforts.
 - b. The software is running on a remote server and we currently do not have access to its code; therefore we can assume that the code is proprietary. Given that the culture of open source has been strongly advocated during this last election, we cannot (in good conscience) depend on a code to which we do not have access.

In order to address the above points, I had suggested that Mike could send us his software (or maybe a scaled down version of it if he cannot send the complete application) so that we can install and run it here on our servers. This move will guarantee that our private data remains on our local servers (reducing the risks of a leak) and we will be able to open the code (provided of course that we get the permission from Mike) to the students as it has been the case for the current Voting script. At the time I am writing this, I have not heard back from Mike about this approach.

3. A third approach has been suggested by Harman Clair. According to him, we should be able to rewrite our scripts into a Java Enterprise Application using a DBMS like MySQL in the back end. This is an idea that is worth pursuing but we will need someone to actually sit down and implement that, perhaps Harman himself?

Hopefully by the time we run another election we will have implemented a solution to solve our problems. If we don't, I fear that we are in a lot of trouble :(.

GOOD LUCK !!