A Resolution to Support the Judicial Panel’s Implementation of Ranked Choice Voting in USG Elections

Joseph Warnimont (for himself, Kurt Shaffer, Sophie Chang, and Noah Bidna) introduced the following resolution to the Oversight Committee where it passed.

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Whereas the Undergraduate Student Government represents all undergraduate students at The Ohio State University, and

Whereas the Undergraduate Student Government conducts its elections via a one-person-one-vote per seat, winner-takes-all system,¹,² and

Whereas this system is known as first-past-the-post (FPTP)³ or plurality voting,⁴ and

Whereas over 45 countries around the world use FPTP, including federal and state elections in the United States,⁵ and

Whereas FPTP, while intuitive, is a flawed voting system that frequently results in unrepresentative election results and that, in some situations, discourages voters from casting ballots for their preferred candidate, and

Whereas, ideally, victors in an election will have won greater than 50% of the votes cast, indicating that a majority of voters approve of them, and

Whereas in single-winner elections with more than two candidates running, victory by a plurality rather than a majority is not uncommon, and

Whereas over the 50 elections held since USG was founded in 1967, 36 resulted in a winner who received less than 50% of the vote,⁶ and

Whereas of the 14 elections where the winner was voted in with a majority, two victors had been unopposed on the ballot,⁶ and

Whereas in the most extreme example, the winner of the 1991 USG election only received 24.4% of the vote,⁶ and

¹ USG Const. art. II, § A, cl. 2. “The President shall be elected annually by the undergraduate student body for a term of one year.”
² Election Bylaws of USG. art. II, § C, cl. 2.
³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-past-the-post_voting
⁴ http://www.fairvote.org/glossary
⁵ http://www.idea.int/esd/type.cfm?electoralSystem=FPTP
⁶ Presidential Election Results: Undergraduate Student Government (1967-present)
Whereas under FPTP, even if a voter supports multiple candidates’ views, they may only cast a single vote, and

Whereas an election with several candidates with similar platforms and ideas would split votes among themselves, hurting any individual’s chance of winning, and

Whereas this discourages candidates with similar views from running, limiting voter choice, and

Whereas FPTP forces voters to consider how other voters will vote (“tactical voting”), resulting in votes cast for “the lesser of two evils” rather than votes cast for a voter’s true favorite candidate, and

Whereas these flaws are inherent in and inseparable from FPTP as a voting system, and

Whereas voting systems without these problems exist, most notably Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also known as preferential voting, and

Whereas in a single-seat RCV system, known as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), voters rank their choices of candidates in order of preference, ranking as many or as few candidates as they wish, and

Whereas after the first round of counting votes, any candidate receiving a majority of votes wins the election, and

Whereas a majority of votes in a single-seat RCV system is defined as 50% of voters plus one, and

Whereas if no candidate has received a majority, the last-place candidate is eliminated, and votes cast for them are distributed to those voters’ second choice candidates, and

Whereas this process is repeated until any candidate has won a majority of votes or there is only one valid candidate left, and

Whereas multi-seat RCV elections, known as Single Transferable Vote (STV), have the modification of requiring a different threshold for victory but overall follow the same process as IRV elections, and

Whereas student governments at over fifty colleges around the United States use forms of RCV in their elections, including at the University of Minnesota, University of Iowa, and Northwestern University, and

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7 http://www.fairvote.org/rcv#how_rcv_works
8 http://www.fairvote.org/rcv_in_campus_elections
9 MSA Const. 3rd Amend. “The President and Vice-President shall be elected using instant runoff voting…”
10 UISG Elections Code. art. VI, § B, cl. 2. “The Presidential Election will be conducted using instant run-off voting.”
11 ASG Code. App. A, § 9, cl. c, cl. 2. “The Schulze method shall be used for positions with 3 or more candidates.”
Whereas USG already uses runoff elections to elect officers internally,\textsuperscript{12} and

Whereas the Inter-Professional Council\textsuperscript{13} and the Council of Graduate Students\textsuperscript{14} here at Ohio State use runoff elections to elect their officers, and

Whereas voters in Maine chose to adopt RCV for state elections in November 2016;\textsuperscript{15}

Therefore, \textbf{Let it Be Resolved} the Undergraduate Student Government General Assembly strongly encourages the Judicial Panel to implement Ranked Choice Voting in USG Presidential and Vice Presidential elections, in a process similar to the language attached to this resolution.

Oversight Committee Vote: Passed.

Floor Vote: Passed.

\textbf{______________________________} __________________________
Gerard Basalla Danielle Di Scala
President Vice President

Date Adopted: \underline{11/30/16} Date Terminated: ____________________

\textsuperscript{12} Standing Rules of the GA. art. XIV, § C, cl. h, cl. ii. “To be elected, a candidate shall receive a simple majority vote of those members of the General Assembly present.”

\textsuperscript{13} IPC Elections Bylaws. art. II, §B, §3, cl. d.

\textsuperscript{14} CGS Bylaws. art. II, §2, cl. H.

Example Bylaws Language for Ranked Choice Voting

For the purposes of this chapter, the following definitions shall apply:

"Ranked Choice Voting" means a method of casting and tabulating votes that simulates the ballot counts that would occur if all voters participated in a series of runoff elections with one candidate eliminated after each round of counting. In elections using the Ranked Choice Voting method, voters may rank the candidates in order of preference.

"Advancing candidate" means a candidate who has not been eliminated.

"Continuing ballot" means a ballot that is not an exhausted ballot.

"Exhausted ballot" means a ballot on which there are no choices marked other than choices for eliminated candidates.

For the offices of USG President and Vice President, the ballots shall be counted by the method of ranked choice voting, prescribed herein:

1. The initial round of counting shall be a count of the first choices marked on each ballot. If any candidate receives a majority of the first choices, that candidate shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.

2. If no candidate receives a majority of first choices, there shall be a second round of counting. The last-place candidate shall be eliminated, and all the continuing ballots shall be recounted. Each continuing ballot shall be counted as one vote for that ballot’s highest ranked advancing candidate.

3. If no candidate receives a majority at the second round of counting, there shall be a third round of counting, continuing in the manner prescribed above.

4. The process of eliminating the last-place candidates and recounting all the continuing ballots shall continue until one candidate receives a majority of the votes in a round. The candidate who receives a majority of the votes in a round shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.

5. When a ballot does not list a preference for any given round, it shall not be counted in that round or any subsequent round.

6. If there are not sufficient second and lower choices for any candidate to receive a majority, the candidate with the highest number of votes shall be declared the winner, pending ratification.

7. When a ballot becomes an exhausted ballot it shall not be counted in that round or any subsequent round.