



111<sup>th</sup> STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSEMBLY  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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## Executive Summary

### A.B. 19: Amending The Constitution and Campus-Wide Election Code of The University of Texas at Austin Student Government to Implement a Single Transferable Voting System

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#### Summary:

This bill changes how students vote in Student Government elections and how their votes are calculated. The proposed method is known as "Single Transferable Vote", also known as STV. This voting system has wide support and is an accepted voting system among colleges across the United States and international governments.

Instead of voting for a single candidate, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. Each voter's single vote initially goes to their most preferred candidate and, as the count proceeds and candidates are either elected or eliminated, is transferred to other candidates according to the voter's preferences. STV ensures the resulting winners are reflective of the entire student voice.<sup>1</sup> STV still gives students the ability to vote only for their top candidate, with the option of ranking more candidates if they so choose. With STV students' votes are not "wasted" when voting for the "sure thing" or "underdog" candidates.<sup>2</sup>

#### Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Why are we doing this?

This would eliminate all runoffs for Student Government positions. This would reduce the subsequent drama and negative coverage in the Daily Texan student newspaper. Beyond reducing the fiasco of Student Government runoff elections, this system of voting – while more complex – would result in a more accurate representation of students' votes.

2. How would this change the way the ballot looks?

Voters would be instructed to rank the given candidates for a select position. This could be done in a matrix or with ordinal numbers, but the ballot would remain comprehensive and easy to use. This system would not require any student to rank everyone on the ballot. Students would still be able to skip complete races or rank only two or three candidates.

3. If passed, when would this amendment go into effect?

Following approval by the Dean of Students Office, the Office of the President, and the Board of Regents, the voting calculations described here would go into effect for the First-Year

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2017/10/04/first-year-representative-elections-aren%E2%80%99t-representative-enough>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/single-transferable-vote/>

Students election in Fall 2018. It would first need to be ratified as a constitutional amendment, hopefully during the Spring 2018 elections.

**Additional Information:**

In Spring 2017, 10,374 votes were initially cast for the Executive Alliance race. In the subsequent runoff, 8,975 votes were cast. 1,400 fewer students participated.

“In my three years of experience with student government elections at Berkeley, I have found IRV to be very time-efficient and democratic. We allow student voters every spring to rank up to 20 candidates for the Senate and any number of candidates for the executive offices.”

-- Angel Symoon Brewer, Elections Chair, University of California-Berkeley

“We have moved to an IRV system for our campus elections. Last year was the first time it was implemented and everything went off without a hitch. As popularity and competition for positions grows, we expect the IRV system to be particularly useful for our students. We actually used your website (<http://www.fairvote.org>) last year as a resource to educate our students on how to vote and why we felt the change was appropriate.”

-- Jason Spencer, Sonoma State University

“Instant runoff has worked quite well for us, and our run-offs have actually occurred not infrequently. I think two of our nine offices last year were chosen through instant run-off (possibly only one, but certainly one), and the choices do seem to mirror what the students at large wanted. The system has been in place for a number of years.”

-- Galen Loram, Student Body President, California Institute of Technology

As of April 2014, university student governments that used ranked choice voting systems included:

Arizona State University

Boise State University

**California Institute of Technology**

California State University, Chico

California State University, Northridge

California Polytechnic State University

**Cornell University**

**Duke University**

Emory Law School

George Washington University

Georgetown University

**Harvard University**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**

Oberlin College

Oregon State University

**Rice University**

**Stanford University**

**Texas A&M University**

**University of California, Berkeley**

University of California, Davis

**University of California, Los Angeles**

University of California, San Diego

University of Virginia

Vassar College

University of Washington

North Carolina State University

# A.B. 19

## Amending The Constitution and Campus-Wide Election Code of The University of Texas at Austin Student Government to Implement a Single Transferable Voting System

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IN THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN STUDENT GOVERNMENT

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**Sponsors:** REPRESENTATIVE BENJAMIN SOLDER (*College of Natural Sciences*) AND REPRESENTATIVE JORDAN COPE (*College of Liberal Arts*)

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN STUDENT GOVERNMENT:**

SEC 1: Amend Article VI in the Constitution of the University of Texas at Austin Student Government as follows on the addendum attached.

SEC 2: Amend Chapter X in the Campus-Wide Election Code at the University of Texas at Austin Student Government as follows:

### Chapter X

#### ELECTION ~~CALCULATIONS AND RESULTS~~RATIFICATIONS

Sec. 10.1 CERTIFICATION OF VOTES. The Dean of Students and the Election Supervisory Board Chair shall certify the votes in all races that are part of Campus-Wide Elections immediately following the closing of polls.

Sec. 10.2 **VOTE CALCULATIONS FOR SINGLE-WINNER ELECTIONS.** In calculating the votes of any single-winner race, the candidate who receives a majority of first choice votes will be certified in the respective position.

- (a) If no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest first choice votes will be eliminated, and each vote cast for that candidate will be transferred to the next ranked candidate on that voter's ballot. Ballots that did not rank down to this level are discarded.
- (b) If, after transfer of votes above, any candidate has a majority of the votes from the continuing ballots, that candidate will be certified in the respective position.
- (c) If no candidate receives a majority of votes from the continuing ballots, this process of transferring votes will be repeated until one candidate has a majority of votes and they will be certified in the respective position.

Sec. 10.3

VOTE CALCULATIONS FOR MULTIPLE-WINNER ELECTIONS. In calculating the votes of any multiple-winner race, first choice ballot rankings initially qualify as full value votes for those respective candidates. A quota of votes necessary to be certified for a position, the Droop quota, will be calculated as one vote plus the quotient, rounded down, of the number of ballots cast and one plus the number of positions available in a race. When, at any stage of the count, any candidate meets or surpasses that quota, they will be certified in the respective position.

- (a) When, at the end of any stage of the count, the number of votes received by any such elected candidate exceeds the quota, the excess votes are transferred to the voters' next preferred candidates, but each vote will be transferred with a value equal to  $A$  divided by  $B$ . " $A$ " will be defined as the product of the number of excess votes of the transferring candidate and the value of the vote when received by that transferring candidate, and " $B$ " will be defined as the total number of votes received by the transferring candidate. The initial value of a first preference vote is one (1) vote. Ballots that did not rank down to this level are discarded.
- (b) The above step will be repeated for each candidate with excess votes, in descending order of excess votes. If a new candidate meets the quota due to a transfer, they will be certified for the respective position. If they exceed the quota, their excess votes are also transferred.
- (c) After this process, if any positions remain to be filled, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Those votes are transferred to the voters' next preferred candidates at the same value when received by the eliminated candidate. This process of distributing excess votes and eliminating candidates will be repeated until the number of candidates meeting the quota equals the number of positions to be filled or the number of continuing candidates equals the number of remaining unfilled positions, in

which case, the continuing candidates will be certified in the respective positions.

- Sec. 10.4 TIE IN ELIMINATING CANDIDATES. In the case of a tie between candidates to be eliminated with the fewest number of votes, the candidate with fewer votes from the previous round will be eliminated. If the tie occurs on the first round, then one candidate shall be eliminated with the flip of a coin and verified by the President of the Election Supervisory Board or Justice of the Supreme Court.
- Sec. 10.52 ELECTION RESULTS ANNOUNCEMENT. Results of any election under this Code shall be announced no later than twenty-four (24) hours after the polls close for the ~~election. election:~~
- ~~Sec. 10.3 LOCATION OF RESULTS.~~ The location of both the announcement and posting of the results is to be announced by the Election Supervisory Board no later than the candidate seminar.

SEC 3: Amend Chapter IX of the Campus-Wide Election Code as follows:

#### Chapter IX

#### POLLING ~~LOCATIONS & STATIONS~~

- Sec. 9.1 JURISDICTION. The Election Supervisory Board shall have jurisdiction over all polling locations on the days of elections governed by this Code.  
(a) All polling locations must abide by this Code.
- Sec. 9.2 PUBLISHING STATION LOCATIONS. The locations of polling stations must be published online and publicized at least twenty-four (24) hours before the start of the first election day.
- Sec. 9.3 PROHIBITION OF CAMPAIGNING AND CAMPAIGN MATERIALS WITHIN POLLING LOCATION PERIMETER. No campaigning or campaign materials may exist within twenty (20) feet of any on-campus polling location.
- Sec. 9.4 INTERNET-READY DEVICES. All reported and published polling locations must have an internet-ready device available on voting days, during voting hours, for the express purpose of facilitating voting.
- Sec. 9.5 RANDOMIZED BALLOT ORDER. The order in which candidates in a single race appear on the ballot shall be randomized, so each candidate appears in each position an equal number of times across all ballots.  
(a) If this is not possible as determined by the Office of the Dean of Students, the order in which candidates appear on the ballot for each race shall be randomized by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This random order will be the order of candidates on every ballot and shall be made known to the candidates at least forty-eight (48) hours before voting begins.

- Sec. 9.6 ~~BALLOT LANGUAGE.~~ The instructions across the top of each race shall explicitly state that candidates are to be ranked and that not all or any candidates must be ranked to proceed.
- Sec. 9.75 ~~CONSISTENT POLLING STATIONS.~~ The same polling stations must be used on both voting days, ~~but may be modified with the same time constraints for the runoff elections if necessary.~~
- Sec. 9.86 ~~POLLING HOURS.~~ The Election Supervisory Board may set limitations on the hours of operation for the polling stations, but may not deny the right to vote to any person standing in line to vote at the time the polling station closes.

SEC 4: Amend Chapter VII, Sec. 7.9–7.17 of the Campus-Wide Election Code as follows:

- Sec. 7.9 ~~CANDIDATE SEMINAR AGENDA.~~ The Election Supervisory Board shall set the agenda for Candidate Seminar.
- (a) ~~The agenda must include the assignment of ballot positions in accordance with this Code, and may~~ include explanations of this Code, review of the election timetable, and answering of candidate questions.
- (b) ~~Attendance at the candidate seminar is required of each candidate running in a race that is part of the Campus-Wide elections process. Failure to attend the Seminar shall not be an acceptable excuse for violating this Code.~~
- Sec. 7.10 ~~CANDIDATE SEMINAR ABSENCE.~~ If the candidate has an excused absence as determined by the Election Supervisory Board, then ~~they/he~~ may send an authorized agent in his or her place.
- (a) ~~The Election Supervisory Board must be notified of the substitution at least twenty-four (24) hours in advance of the Candidate Seminar.~~
- ~~Sec. 7.11~~ ~~BALLOT ORDER.~~ ~~Ballot positions for all candidates in all races shall be decided during the Candidate Seminar by blind drawing or other satisfactory, secret, random method devised by the Election Supervisory Board. After all ballot positions for all races are determined for those present, the same process shall be used to determine ballot position for the absent candidates.~~
- ~~Sec. 7.12~~ ~~PRIMACY PENALTY.~~ ~~No absent candidate may receive a ballot position above a candidate who was at the Candidate Seminar.~~
- (a) ~~The first ballot position available to absent candidates shall be after the last position assigned to a candidate who was present.~~
- Sec 7.113 ~~CANDIDATE ELIGIBILITY.~~ Each group will be responsible for certifying each candidate’s eligibility before the Candidate Seminar.
- (a) ~~Candidates who fail to meet eligibility requirements will be disqualified immediately and notified of this action in writing.~~

## SUBCHAPTER C: Financial Disclosures

- Sec. 7.1~~24~~ CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURE RECORDS. Each candidate must keep accurate and up-to-date records of all campaign receipts and expenditures. A template for financial disclosures for use by all candidates will be developed by the Election Supervisory Board and provided to each group by the first day of filing.
- Sec. 7.1~~36~~ PROHIBITED AFFILIATION. Except in cases of a bona fide executive alliance as provided for in this Code, no candidate is allowed to contribute financially or provide any other form of tangible support, including but not limited to campaign materials, to another candidate's campaign.
- (a) Sharing campaign money, campaign materials, and resources between and amongst candidates who are not in a bona fide executive alliance is strictly prohibited.
- Sec. 7.1~~47~~ FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENT. Financial disclosure statements shall be filed with the Election Supervisory Board, in the Student Government Office (SAC 2.102) or other locations designated by the Election Supervisory Board, at the following times:
- (a) by 4:30pm, on the first day of campaigning;
- (b) by 4:30pm, on the last day of the second week of campaigning;
- (c) by 4:30pm, on the last day before the General or Special Election.;
- ~~(d) by 4:30pm, on the first day of campaigning in a Runoff Election;~~
- ~~(e) by 4:30pm, on the last day of voting in a Runoff Election.~~

SEC 5: Amend Chapter VI, Sec. 6.5 of the Campus-Wide Election Code as follows:

- Sec. 6.5 ADVERTISEMENT OF BALLOT. The Election Supervisory Board shall advertise the complete ballot, ~~with proper ballot order~~, in the student newspaper of the University at least seven (7) days prior to the Campus-Wide Elections.

SEC 6: Remove Chapter VI, Sec. 6.2 of the Campus-Wide Election Code.

SEC 7: This bill shall be sent to the Dean of Students, the Deputy Advisory to the Dean of Students and the Vice President of Student Affairs.

- (a) The ballot for the Spring 2018 Campus-Wide general or runoff elections shall include the following question, so that students may vote on it: Do you support the implementation of a proportional voting system for student government elections?
- (b) Should a runoff election not occur, the question should still be listed on a ballot on March 7th and 8th for students to vote on it.

SEC 8: The Assembly Clerk shall update the Campus-Wide Election Code and Constitution and provide an electronic copy to the Communications Director, who shall update the SG website accordingly.

## Addendum

### Article VI ELECTIONS

- Sec. 6.1 ANNUAL SPRING GENERAL ELECTIONS. General elections shall be held on the Wednesday and Thursday of the week three weeks prior to the start of the University's spring break as reflected by the official University academic calendar.
- Sec. 6.2 VOTE ELIGIBILITY BY THE STUDENT BODY IN GENERAL ELECTIONS. Each student may rank all candidates running for President and Vice President, all candidates running for their respective college or school in the Assembly, and all candidates running for University-wide representative. ~~cast one (1) vote for President and Vice President, one (1) vote for each available seat for the respective college or school in the Assembly, and one (1) vote for each available University-wide representative seat.~~
- Sec. 6.3 ANNUAL FALL FIRST-YEAR ELECTIONS. Elections for the two (2) representatives from the incoming class of first-year students shall be held on one (1) weekday during the third full week of September.
- Sec. 6.4 FILING FOR FIRST-YEAR ELECTIONS. Filing shall begin the day before the first full day of classes of the fall semester and last for three (3) full weeks.
- Sec. 6.5 CAMPAIGNING FOR FIRST-YEAR ELECTIONS. Campaigning shall begin the day after the filing deadline and last for one (1) full week. All campaign regulations shall be determined by the election code of the Student Government.
- Sec. 6.6 FIRST-YEAR ELECTION OVERSIGHT. The Supreme Court shall oversee the elections of the First-year representatives.

- Sec. 6.7 CALLING SPECIAL ELECTIONS. The President or the Assembly by a three fourths (3/4) vote shall have the power to call special elections.
- Sec. 6.8 VOTE ELIGIBILITY BY THE STUDENT BODY IN FIRST-YEAR ELECTIONS. First-year students may rank all of the ~~east one (1) vote for each~~ First-year Representative ~~candidates~~~~electe~~d from the incoming class of undergraduate and graduate first-year students.
- Sec. 6.9 CERTIFYING RESULTS OF SINGLE-WINNER ELECTIONS. In calculating the votes of any single-winner race, an instant runoff voting system will be used as enumerated in the Campus-Wide Election Code. The candidate(s) who receives a majority of votes shall be certified in the respective position.~~The candidate or candidates receiving the highest number of votes for the Assembly seat or seats available shall be certified in the respective position.~~
- Sec. 6.10 CERTIFYING RESULTS OF MULTIPLE-WINNER ELECTIONS. In calculating the votes of any multiple-winner race, a single transferable voting system will be used as enumerated in the Campus-Wide Election Code. The candidates who meet or surpass a Droop quota shall be certified in the respective positions. If, at any point in the count, the number of continuing candidates equals the number of remaining unfilled positions, the continuing candidates shall be certified in the respective positions.
- ~~Sec. 6.10 EXECUTIVE ALLIANCE CERTIFICATION THRESHOLD. A Presidential and Vice Presidential executive alliance must receive a majority of the votes cast in their respective race to be certified.~~
- ~~Sec. 6.11 EXECUTIVE ALLIANCE RUNOFF ELECTION DETERMINATION. If no executive alliance for President and Vice President receives a majority of the votes, the two executive alliances receiving the highest number of votes for their respective positions shall have a runoff election.~~
- Sec. 6.12 ~~RUNOFF ELECTIONS IN NON-EXECUTIVE ALLIANCE RACES.~~

~~In the instance that the top candidates receive a tie vote, a runoff election will occur:~~

~~Sec. 6.13 CERTIFICATION IN RUNOFF ELECTIONS. The candidate(s) receiving the highest number of votes in the runoff shall be certified in the position:~~

~~Sec. 6.14 TIE IN RUNOFF ELECTIONS. In the case of a tie in the runoff for President and Vice President or representative, the current and newly elected representatives shall vote on the two candidates. The candidate who receives a majority of the votes of the representatives present and voting shall be certified for the position. A representative who serves in both assemblies is entitled to two votes:~~

~~Sec. 6.15 TIE IN ASSEMBLY ELECTION TO BREAK THE TIE IN A RUNOFF. In the case of a tie in the Assembly vote to break a tie in a runoff election, the current President shall cast the deciding vote:~~

~~Sec. 6.116 NO MINIMUM NUMBER OF VOTES. There shall be no constitutional provision requiring a minimum number of voters participating in any general or special election in order to validate that election.~~