

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION GRADUATE STUDENT ELECTIONS MANUAL

Revised February 2025

The primary purpose of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) Elections Manual of The University of Alabama is to provide guidelines to ensure honest, fair, and open elections for all who are involved. In upholding its responsibility to the student body, the Election Committee, with the support of the Executive Council, will endeavor to hold candidates to the highest level of accountability for their actions (or actions performed on their behalf) using the Elections Manual as a guide. All candidates and their campaign teams shall be responsible for knowing its contents. Any questions concerning this manual shall be addressed to the gsa@ua.edu.

All Candidates for GSA offices and their campaign teams must adhere to the letter and spirit of the Capstone Creed in all campaign and electioneering activities:

The Capstone Creed

As a member of The University of Alabama community, I will pursue knowledge; act with fairness, integrity, and respect; embrace and uphold the dignity of all; foster individual, collective and civic responsibility; and strive for excellence in all I do.

I. Elections Timeline

- a. The GSA Election Committee, with support from the Executive Council, shall oversee setting all dates of the election-related events listed in this section, subject to any further provisions of the Elections Manual. The President of GSA shall declare all deadlines and dates related to filing, campaigning, and election days for Special and Spring General Elections. Once the dates have been set, the President of GSA will deliver this information to The Crimson White and the House of Delegates.
 - i. The filing period will begin in the third week of March and will be open for two weeks.
 - ii. Elections will be held by the 3rd Tuesday in April
- b. The Vice President of Operations of GSA on behalf of the Election Committee shall issue a press release at the opening of the filing period for special and spring general elections and issue appropriate campus-wide announcements including, but not limited to, social media and website postings and notices in Inside UA for Students, The Crimson White, and other campus-wide newsletters. The press release shall include the following:
 - i. Positions to be filled in the election
 - ii. Dates for the opening and closing of the filing period
 - iii. Time & place that a person may file for office

- iv. Dates of the election and any run-off
 - v. Name & contact information for the GSA Vice President of Operations
- c. The Election Committee shall determine reasonable dates for the following:
- i. Candidate informational meetings
 - ii. The start of the official campaign period
 - iii. Candidate debates and forums

II. Qualification of Candidates

- a. President
- i. Candidates for President must be in good academic and disciplinary standing with The University of Alabama and must remain in this status during their term unless there are mitigating circumstances in which the student can request a review for an exemption by the Dean of Students, who may assign appropriate sanctions in addition to whatever requirements are already in place by the Office of Student Conduct.
 - ii. Candidates for President must have completed at least four semesters at the graduate level by the conclusion of the academic year during which they seek appointment.
 - iii. Candidacy shall not be restricted based on race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, genetic information, religion, creed, veteran status, criminal record, or political affiliation.
- b. Executive Vice President, Vice President of Operations, Vice President of Student Engagement, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Financial Affairs, Vice President of Opportunities Connections and Success, and Vice President of Public Relations.
- i. Candidates for Vice President positions must be currently enrolled graduate students at the University of Alabama.
 - ii. Candidates for Vice President positions must have earned at least 9 credit hours as a graduate student from The University of Alabama.
 - iii. Candidacy shall not be restricted based on race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, genetic information, religion, creed, veteran status, criminal record, or political affiliation.

III. Declaring Candidacy

- a. Any eligible student wishing to run for elected office must submit an online declaration and statement of their intent to seek office. The declaration and statement shall include the following:
- i. Declaration of position the student is seeking.
 - ii. Statement of Intent – A statement that is no more than 350 words, which will be posted as a candidate profile on social media and the myBama voting page during Election Day. The statement must answer the following questions:

1. Who are you? (This includes basic information, campus involvement, etc.)
 2. Why are you running?
 3. What is your platform?
- iii. All candidates shall only be permitted to run for one elected position on the Executive Council in a given year. Once a student has filed for an office, they may not change to any other office.
- b. Any member of the outgoing Executive Council wishing to declare candidacy for a position on the incoming Executive Council will not be allowed to partake in any setting of deadlines, review of candidacy, review of complaints, or violations or be otherwise permitted to participate in the process for election of the next Executive Council.
 - i. If the member is the Vice President of Operations or the Vice President of Public Relations, the next member of the outgoing Executive Council in GSA's line of succession will take over in any areas in this document where the Vice President of Operations or Vice President of Public Relations is referred to until we reach a member not seeking a position on the incoming Executive Council.

IV. Withdrawal from Campaign

- a. If a candidate wishes to withdraw from an election, they must do so by reaching out to the GSA at gsa@ua.edu from their personal CRIMSON email account.
- b. No person may withdraw from an election less than five (5) class days prior to the election.
- c. Should a withdrawn candidate's name be inadvertently placed on the ballot, they shall be considered withdrawn and thus ineligible to win the election. Votes for this candidate will not be counted.

V. Ballot

- a. All GSA elections shall be conducted by secret ballot via the voting portal on myBama.
- b. Absentee ballots shall not be permitted in any GSA election.
- c. Write-in votes shall be permitted in any GSA election. A designated area on the electronic ballot must allow voters to type the first name and last name of their preferred candidate into the electronic voting system.
- d. Write-in votes that display discriminatory or harassing remarks will be omitted from the unofficial and official results, as this is a violation of Offenses against Persons. Review Harassment in the Student Code of Conduct for more information.
- e. The Election Committee, with the support of the Vice President of Public Relations, will post the final candidate list via the Graduate Student Association Instagram at least three (3) class days prior to the day of the election.

VI. Voting

- a. Any Student currently enrolled at The University of Alabama as a graduate student may vote in GSA elections.
- b. Polls will be open for forty-eight (48) hours for GSA elections.

VII. Determination of Winners

- a. Winners for GSA Executive Offices will be determined pursuant to:
 - i. Candidates for any executive office shall be elected by a majority of votes cast.
 - ii. A majority of votes cast is equal to fifty (50) percent of the votes cast plus one (1) additional vote.
 - iii. In the event that candidates for any executive office fail to receive a majority of votes cast, a run-off election shall be conducted with the two (2) candidates who receive the largest percentage of votes cast no sooner than two (2) class days following the election but not later than ten full class days after the election.
 1. The Election Committee will post a sample candidate list on social media for the purpose of a run-off by 9:00 a.m. the day after voting, which results in a run-off close to the Graduate Student Association Instagram account.

VIII. Contesting an Election

- a. Any student wishing to contest the results of a GSA election shall file a petition in writing with the Vice President of Operations of GSA within three (3) full class days after the election results are available.
- b. The Vice President of Operations must notify the Election Committee within two (2) full class days that a petition contesting the results of a GSA election has been filed.
- c. The hearing must be conducted by a committee composed of 7 members of GSA's House of Delegates.
- d. The following shall be grounds for contesting election results:
 - i. Misconduct, fraud, or irregularity by any election official sufficient to change or place in doubt the result of a GSA election.
 - ii. Ineligibility of any person elected to the office in dispute.
 - iii. Receipt of illegal votes or rejection of legal votes, such as write-in votes that display discriminatory or harassing remarks, in an amount sufficient to change or place in doubt the result of a GSA election.
 - iv. An error in the counting of votes or in the declaration of the result of an election sufficient to change or place in doubt the result of a GSA election.
 - v. Any other cause sufficient to change or place in doubt the result of a GSA election.

IX. Candidate Meetings

- a. The Election Committee shall hold Informational Meetings before Candidate Declarations and Statements are due to provide the candidates with the Elections Manual, along with a simple explanation of basic campaigning guidelines and a general election timeline.

- b. All candidates (including those running for re-election) must attend all mandatory meetings appropriate to the office they are pursuing. These meetings are for the explicit purpose of informing the candidates of their potential duties, responsibilities, and expectations.
- c. If a candidate is unable to attend one of the mandatory meetings, the candidate must notify and provide an explanation of the absence to the Graduate Student Association (gsa@ua.edu) before each mandatory meeting. If excused, the candidate will work with the Election Committee to determine alternate arrangements. If a candidate does not attend a candidate informational meeting or make the necessary arrangements with the Election Committee, they will be disqualified from the race.
- d. The Election Committee shall make available, at no charge to any candidate or campaign, the opportunity to have headshots taken at the informational meetings for GSA-wide and individual campaign marketing purposes. Candidates are permitted to use their own photos for campaign purposes.

X. Campaigning

- a. Campaigning, for the purposes of the Graduate Student Association Elections, is defined as but not limited to any written statement, speaking engagement, display, or active distribution of any campaign material and/or activity during the official campaign period that is intended to encourage voting for an individual candidate or group of candidates.
- b. The candidate is responsible for communicating campaign guidelines to their campaign team.
- c. Campaigning does not include reporting by media outlets on any candidate, referendum, petition, or constitutional amendment.
- d. Campaign Organization and Preparation
 - i. Candidates may begin preparation in advance of the established campaign period. Campaign preparation also includes any work done outside the public eye to prepare for the announcement of candidacy. This includes, but is not limited to, forming group messages for members of the campaign team, building social media platforms (not to be set to public until the campaigning period begins), working and/or purchasing any campaign materials and photos, etc.
 - ii. Candidates are allowed to formally announce to groups in which they are a member that they are running for any position before the campaign period begins for the sole purpose of recruiting their campaign team. Candidates are prohibited from asking members of organizations to vote for them until the official campaign period begins.
- e. Campaign Materials
 - i. Campaign materials for the purposes of the GSA Elections shall be defined as any paraphernalia bearing the name, logo, mark, or likeness of a candidate, including, but not limited to, flyers, literature, pamphlets, buttons, clothing, table tents, advertisements, and electronic communication utilized during the official campaign period.

- ii. No UA emblems, logos, or trademarked materials can be used on campaign materials. Students featuring in campaign photos or videos wearing branded apparel will be exempted.
- f. Campaigning On Campus
 - i. Campaigns must be considerate of academic classes and other activities taking place on campus. No campaigning shall be allowed inside any University building or within twenty-five (25) feet of any entrance to a University building. Specifically exempt are candidate organizational meetings and meetings of registered student organizations and The University of Alabama Student Center and Plaza. This also includes all University of Alabama Student Center awnings. Also exempt is the wearing of and/or display of campaign buttons on clothing and backpacks/bags in academic buildings.
 - ii. The Graduate Student Center and all GSA functions shall be considered neutral ground and campaigning is strictly forbidden.
 - iii. Posting of campaign signs and/or posters in classrooms and writing on chalkboards/whiteboards or similar devices is strictly forbidden. Posting on electronic platforms that have been set up as an extension of the classroom by faculty and staff is also strictly forbidden. In addition, faculty members posting campaign materials on behalf of a candidate in the classroom is strictly forbidden.
 - iv. Student organizations may reserve an information table at the Student Center in order to promote their candidate. Individuals may only campaign within five feet of the reserved information table.
 - v. Signs that can be staked into the ground will be allowed in specified areas in accordance with an approved Grounds Use Permit.
 - vi. Any types of self-adhesive materials (stickers, etc.) are strictly prohibited as campaign material. No campaign materials are to be taped to the campus grounds.
 - vii. No chalking is allowed.
 - viii. Banners of any kind or size are strictly prohibited on campus.
 - ix. The date, time, and location of a campaign stop that involves structures/tables or food must have prior approval from the UA Department of Facilities and Grounds and must conform to guidelines for campus demonstrations as listed in the Campus Grounds Use Policy. A campus Grounds Use Permit (GUP) may be required for a campaign stop. A campaign stop shall be defined as any public activity on the part of candidates that demonstrates involvement in the election process, disseminates the views and platforms of a particular candidate, and/or actively solicits votes or support from members of the student body. A campaign stop may feature the use of campaign material so long as it conforms to guidelines pertaining to the content and location of said materials as outlined elsewhere in the Elections Manual.
- g. Campaigning Off Campus

- i. Posting of banners must follow Tuscaloosa City ordinances for political signage. Candidates are cautioned against campaigning off campus due to potential violations of city and county laws.
 - ii. Violation of solicitation policies of apartment complexes, condominiums, businesses, etc. could result in prosecution.
- h. Social and Electronic Media
 - i. Only free social media platforms are allowed to be used for campaigning. The use of sponsored or boosted posts on any free social media platform is strictly prohibited. Campaigning on Blackboard or use of UA email accounts to send unsolicited bulk mail messages is prohibited. Campaign-related messages may not be posted in social media groups or messaging platforms that are tied to official UA academic courses.

XI. Campaign Ethics

- a. Candidates are expected to conduct themselves in an ethically appropriate manner in accordance with Graduate Student Association documents and the UA Code of Student Conduct. A violation of this Manual may also be a violation of the UA Code of Student Conduct or other University policy.
- b. A candidate or volunteer may under no circumstances intentionally interfere with the campaign of another candidate in any way.
- c. Tampering or interfering with campus elections or an individual's right to vote in the same is strongly prohibited. These prohibited actions include asking or requiring someone to provide evidence of voting for a particular candidate or issue; coercing or using valuable incentives to induce an individual to vote for a particular candidate or issue; or taking detrimental actions against an individual who refuses to vote for a particular candidate or issue.
- d. Sanctions for incentive violations can be imposed on candidates, students, and/or Source-registered organizations at the discretion of the Election Committee.

XII. Election Fraud

- a. Election fraud shall be defined as any willful act, deed, or conspiracy that violates the integrity of the electoral process before, during or after actual voting occurs. Elections fraud shall include, but not be limited to, the following acts:
 - i. Attempting, with or without success, to vote in place of another.
 - ii. Attempting, with or without success, to coerce or procure votes by the payment, delivery, or promise of money or other article of value.
 - iii. Attempting, with or without success, to coerce or procure votes by the use of threats or intimidation.
 - iv. Retaliation for reporting election violations.
 - v. Making disparaging assertions with the intent to defame other candidates or campaigns.

- vi. Tampering or interfering with an election or a student's right to vote in the same, including, but not limited to, requiring someone to provide evidence of voting in an election.

XIII. Endorsements

- a. Only UA graduate students eligible to vote in a GSA election or groups comprised exclusively of UA graduate students eligible to vote may, with prior approval of the candidate, publicly endorse a candidate.
- b. Candidates may be contacted by any University of Alabama registered organization for the purposes of speaking at meetings to seek endorsements. Any public endorsement must include the disclaimer statement below: “(Organization name) endorses (candidate name) for (insert position). Our members’ votes are their own, and they have the right to choose whether to vote and whom to vote for. We encourage all voters to research any and all candidates and to decide for themselves.”
- c. Endorsement from groups, organizations, or individuals outside the campus and its population is strictly prohibited.
- d. Members of the faculty are discouraged from engaging in campaigning on behalf of students or making statements in support of selected candidates in the classroom.

XIV. Campaign Kick-Off, Debate, and Forum

- a. The Election Committee will determine the time, date, and location of a campaign forum. All candidates or a specified representative must be present to allow members of the student body to communicate and ask questions of all candidates running.
 - i. The Election Committee shall be empowered to select the time, format, and any moderators for the forum.
- b. A presidential candidate debate is to take place during the campaign term and is recommended to take place 1-2 nights before Election Day.
 - i. The Election Committee shall be empowered to select the time, format, and any moderators for the debate.

XV. Violations

- a. Any member of The University of Alabama graduate student community shall have the right to file a complaint. Complaints must be filed in writing to gsa@ua.edu. Oral complaints will not be accepted. Complaints must contain the following:
 - i. Name of the candidate and/or individual(s) who committed the alleged violation
 - ii. Brief description of the alleged violation, including the date and time of the incident and reference to the relevant provisions of the Elections Manual
 - iii. Any applicable evidenceThe printed name of the person filing the complaint

- iv. Signature of the person filing the complaint. No anonymous complaints will be reviewed. Complaints must be filed within twenty-four (24) hours of the violation or within twenty-four (24) hours of when the violation is known.
- b. The respondent to the complaint will be notified within twelve (12) hours upon receipt of said complaint by the Vice President of Operations. The respondent will then have twelve (12) hours to submit a response.
- c. The Election Committee shall review all complaints within twelve (12) hours of receiving all materials including the response from the respondent. If the Committee decides by a majority vote that the complaint merits a hearing, then a hearing shall be scheduled within two (2) class days. In the hearing, the person or persons filing the complaint shall carry the burden of proof.
- d. If the Council decides to hear a complaint, a member of the Council will inform all involved individuals of both the charges they face and a summary of the evidence.
- e. The respondent is found responsible only if a majority vote of the Council finds them responsible upon a preponderance of the evidence. If the Council determines a responsible finding in the hearing, the Council has the discretion to impose a penalty.
- f. After notification of a Council ruling, all parties will have twenty-four (24) hours from the delivery of the finding to appeal the ruling.
- g. Appeals of Election Committee decisions shall be heard by a committee of 7 members of the House of Delegates.
 - i. If the accused party is found to have been responsible, the committee shall reserve the right to act in any or all of the following ways:
 - 1. Restrict a campaign or campaign staff from campaigning in certain locations or for specified time periods
 - 2. Disqualify the candidate from the election

XVI. Special Elections

- a. A special election to fill a vacant Executive Council position will be held every twenty (20) full class days after the vacancy has been created, beginning from the first day of the fall semester until forty (40) class days prior to spring GSA elections. At forty (40) class days prior to the spring GSA elections, vacant Executive Council positions will remain unfilled and shall only be filled by candidates that qualify to run in the regular spring GSA election.

XVII. Referenda or Amendments

- a. The full text of the amendment(s) to be voted on shall be published by the Vice President of Operations and the Vice President of Public Relations online at the website of the Graduate Student Association at least two (2) weeks prior to the referendum.
- b. Each amendment must be ratified by two-thirds (2/3) of the students voting on the amendments.

XVIII. Amendments to the Elections Manual

A comprehensive review of this elections manual by the outgoing Executive Council shall be made in the Spring semester of each year before the time in which the elections process shall begin.

Although the policies contained herein are intended to reflect the current rules and policies of the University, users are cautioned that changes or additions may have become effective since the publication of this material. In the event of a conflict, current statements of Council policy contained in the Bylaws, Rules, official minutes, and other pronouncements of the UA Administration, or superseding law, shall prevail.