



USA DANCE BOARD MEMBERS RESIGNATIONS: Chapter Response to Allegations of Election Misconduct

The 2014 elections for USA Dance Chapter #2011 were unprecedented in that there were fourteen candidates running for nine board positions. Moreover, upon completion of the election, three of the elected candidates resigned prior to taking office, citing what they perceived to be unfair and biased election procedures as their reason for this decision. As justification, these candidates provided what they claimed to be an incomplete list of USA Dance policy violations.

The purpose of this article is to openly provide the USA Dance membership with a response to the claims of bias and unfair election practices and to provide an overview of the election procedures in support of our response as needed. Due to the impact that these resignations have on the Chapter, it is the responsibility of the Chapter leadership to communicate this information to the membership. To not expose such material would create an atmosphere of distrust and anxiety and potentially foster further divisions within our dance community.

Voter Disenfranchisement Claims

The first set of perceived violations were classified as voter disenfranchisement and were comprised of the assertions that the Nominations and Election Committee (N&EC) failed to send ballots to all members in good standing and provided contradictory information with respect to voting dates.

Failure to send ballots to all members is impossible to address since specific individuals were not identified by the claimants. However, the N&EC did perform the following actions with respect to the mailing of ballots:

- The N&EC used the membership list provided by the USA Dance national office to send the original 335 ballots to the Chapter membership on October 15th.
- The N&EC conducted an additional six mailings of ballots between October 28th and November 10th.
 - The N&EC mailed ballots to fifteen new members during this period.
 - The N&EC re-mailed ballots to five members that claimed to or had not received the original mailing. Each of these members were contacted to obtain their updated address so that the mailing would reach them. It should be noted that the N&EC went above and beyond what was required in the cases where the addresses were outdated. In accordance with USA Dance Bylaws Article III E:

... Members also have an obligation to keep USA Dance informed of their current permanent address for purposes of notification and region privileges.

By not maintaining their permanent address up to date these individuals had not met their obligation to the organization to maintain their regional privileges which includes voting rights.

- In two instances ballots were not re-mailed to members whose ballots were returned. In one instance, when contacted the member requested that the ballot not be sent as they were not going to vote. In the other case the member was left over a dozen voice messages over the course of two weeks. None of these calls were returned so the ballot could not be resent without a valid address.
- In one instance the second mailing of a ballot was returned to the N&EC on November 14th. Since this was the post mark due date for the ballots there was no point in attempting to mail it yet again another time.
- Finally, all members had the opportunity to request the N&EC to resend ballots to them if they had not been received. As an example, Ms. Taylor Wall (one of the claimants) exercised this right.

To the best of the N&EC's knowledge all members in good standing received their ballots excluding the exceptions mentioned above.

With respect to the perceived violations associated with contradictory information on voting dates there were two concerns listed:

1. the N&EC had never announced that ballots would be invalid if not "postmarked after" the date as printed on the ballots, and
2. The ballots stated that the ballots must be "Postmarked by November 15th" while other published information stated that ballots must be received by noon on November 15th.

With respect to item one there is no USA Dance bylaw, policy or procedure which requires the N&EC to announce ballot deadlines other than on the ballots themselves. Specifically, USA Dance Bylaws (Article XII.F.3) as well as the Election Procedures for USA Dance Chapters clearly state that the deadline must be published on the ballots. Consequently, item one does not constitute a violation of USA Dance Policy.

Item 2 should be corrected since the ballot stated that they must be "post marked ... prior to November 15th". Again USA Dance Bylaws Article XII.F.3 and the Election Procedures for USA Dance Chapters both state that the deadline must be published on the ballots. Although the N&EC attempted to provide accurate information to the membership prior to the voting period, as a curtesy, it became apparent to the N&EC as the period approached that:

1. We could not guarantee that the Postal Service would deliver mail by the noon deadline on November 15th, and
2. Potential business commitments may prevent the Election Chairman from being available to receive any ballots delivered by noon on November 15th.

The deadline as published on the ballot avoided having a member of the N&EC available on November 15th to receive the ballots. As the only valid deadline required by USA Dance Bylaws and Procedures is one published on the ballot there is no USA Dance violation with respect to this item.

Voter Intimidation Claims

This claim pertains to a letter sent by the N&EC to Chapter members residing outside of the Twin Cities metro area. The letter in question is included as an attachment at the end of this article for your review (Attachment #1 - Election Notice).

The claims are that the letter was threatening; that members outside of the geographic area serviced by a Chapter can be members of the Chapter; that no letter of correction was sent to these members; and that therefore, many of these members chose not to vote.

First, this letter should be placed in context. At the time of its writing the N&EC had just been informed that the Chapter membership had substantially increased. This increase included over 50 members that lived outside of the Twin Cities metro area in Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Secondly, one is compelled to ask why all these individuals were joining the Minnesota Chapter when there are other Chapters nearer to them that could service their dance needs? In this, you should consider the possibilities and form your own opinions.

Let examine each of the claims. Two of the items listed in the claim are that the current USA Dance leadership is allowing non-local members to join Chapters and that many of the non-local members chose not to vote. Both of these items are statements of facts not actions of the N&EC and as such cannot be policy violations. Although I cannot address it here, membership in a Chapter and associated voting rights when one resides outside its service area is now being reassessed at a national level.

With respect to a member's decision not to vote and the claim that in many cases it was due to concerns about potential repercussions, all we can do is to point out the fact that not only did the N&EC letter encourage individuals to vote where ethically appropriate, but that a number of non-metro area members did contact the national and/or the local leadership teams. In some cases, those individuals chose to vote and in other cases they chose not to. Not because of any perceived repercussions but because they determined for themselves that this was the appropriate action for them to take. In all cases, it was a personal choice to vote or not.

With respect to the letter, although it was sent by the N&EC to those members with non-metro addresses, it outlined a set of options for them to pursue including voting in our Chapter's election. It specified that if they were active in the Chapter there should have no cause for concern; whereas if they were not active that there may or may not be consequences. If these non-metro individuals were active in the Chapter why would they be concerned about repercussions and not vote? In any case, the N&EC is not prevented, but is required by USA Dance Procedures to run a fair and unbiased election. As such, it must encourage members to vote, which was done in the letter, and yet it must prevent any sort of election manipulation.

The last claim is that no letter of correction was sent. The N&EC did not send out any further communication directly to the non-metro membership with respect to their participation in the Chapter election. However, an article was published in the November edition of the Chapter newsletter discussing Ethical Election behavior (Attachment #2 – Ethical Election Behavior). Again, as in the letter sent to non-metro members, each member was encouraged to behave ethically, make sure that they were a member of the appropriate Chapter, understand the views of each candidate and vote. Accordingly, the N&EC does not feel that a correction letter was warranted or that any USA Dance policies were violated by not sending such a letter.

Finally, it should be noted that the N&EC provided contact information in each Chapter newsletter since September. Any member with election concerns had the opportunity to contact any member of the N&EC to obtain clarification. It should also be noted that a number of individuals did contact the Chapter or national leadership team for such clarification.

Equal Treatment of Candidates

Six claims are made with respect to treatment of the candidates with respect to both the N&EC and the Chapter Board (CB). Given the number of claims each will be addressed in order.

1. Endorsements were made in the Minnesota Dancer publication for some candidates without any offers being made to the other candidates

This claim is simply ludicrous. Each candidate is responsible for running and managing their own election campaign. It is not the responsibility of the N&EC or the CB to do this on their behalf and implying that it is a policy violation because these individuals did not possess the foresight to effectively campaign is irresponsible. Anyone may place an advertisement in the Chapter newsletter if they are willing to pay the associated costs and it meets editorial standards - which of course a candidate's advertisement or endorsement generally would. This was well known to the claimants as one of them (Theresa Kimler) had previously been a member of the Chapter Newsletter committee. Clearly, there is no USA Dance policy violation associated with this claim.

2. The election committee held interviews without clearly conveying the ultimate purpose of the interviews – to publish commentary in the Minnesota Dancer publication.

The candidates clearly had access and were made aware of the Election Procedures for USA Dance Chapters from the beginning of the election process. This was evident by their submission of a petition to avoid the N&EC selection process and the inquiries made by Mr. Daniel O'Connell on their behalf.

It should be noted here that Daniel O'Connell submitted the candidate petitions to the election committee for Theresa Kimler, Taylor Wall, Rosemary O'Connell, Cathy Dessert, Michael Kasinkas, Andrew Nordberg, himself, and an incomplete submission for Jeff Skaalrud.

The Election Procedures for USA Dance clearly states that *"The Committee may make its nominations based on appropriate criteria, such as length of volunteer service to the chapter as well as experience and qualifications for the Board."* Additionally, each candidate was informed at the beginning of their interview that it was being conducted to fulfill the USA Dance Chapter Election procedural requirements. Since the candidates had submitted petitions under these same procedures and were required to be placed on the ballot, the only way the N&EC could inform the membership of its nominations was through equal treatment of all candidates. This was accomplished through interviews and subsequent publication of an interview summary to the membership.

3. Candidates were not informed that any content of the interview would be made public at any point, nor were they given any say in what was published in the Minnesota Dancer publication

This is another absurd claim. All of the candidates were running for office in a member based non-profit organization. As such, the membership is entitled to know the views of their candidates so that they may make informed decisions when voting for their officials (Attachment #3 - Board Candidate Interview Questions). When running for such a position each candidate needs to expect that their words and actions will be made public both during their campaign and after they take office. This is part and parcel with taking an organizational leadership role. From the claim it appears that these candidates did not want their views announced to the membership and that they wanted to control what was being published about their positions. Reporting candidate views should not be subject to censorship by anyone including the candidates themselves. There are no USA Dance policy violations associated with this claim.

4. False statements were made in the Minnesota Dancer publication regarding candidate's qualifications

This claim lacks specificity. Consequently, it is difficult to confirm or refute. To the best of our knowledge no false claims were made about any of the candidates. The material published on each candidate was either collected directly from their application, during the interview process, or based on records of prior performance. It should be noted that at no time has any candidate contacted the Minnesota Dancer editor, the N&EC, or the CB to request a correction in any published article pertaining to their qualifications.

5. Claims were falsely made about some candidates, but when similar claims could be made truthfully about other candidates, those claims were not made

This claim also lacks specificity and as with the previous item cannot be validated or disproved. In addition, to being duplicative of item four it implies that some facts were not published about other candidates. Although it is unclear as to what the claimants were thinking of when writing this we can confirm that numerous details were not published about each of the candidates, not only due to newsletter space and cost constraints but also since not all facts about each candidate are known.

6. The election committee violated USA Dance policy and overstepped its authority by recommending candidates in a biased and unfair manner

In the response to item two above, the function and responsibility of the N&EC was discussed and shown to include informing the membership of its assessment of the candidates in accordance to the Election Procedures for USA Dance Chapters. It should also be noted that even when candidates were not recommended, the N&EC tempered this assessment with statements regarding their past chapter leadership roles and/or the chapter functions they wished to support (when known) as was done with every one of the candidates. If the N&EC were attempting to act in a biased and unfair manner such statements would not have been published. The N&EC acted in accordance with USA Dance policy and as such no violation was committed.

Conclusion

In summary the candidates stated that "These actions demonstrate active campaigning and electioneering by the Nominations and Election Committee for certain candidates and directly violate the election procedures for USA Dance Chapters." This is used as justification for their decision to resign from their elected office.

The Twin City metro dance community is small and any dissent expressed within it eventually reaches all of its members. We have responded to each of the claims submitted not out of malice but to provide the membership with an understanding of what has transpired following the election and to forestall any future questions regarding the election process. We believe that we have demonstrated that the perception of active campaigning, electioneering, bias, and unfairness made by the claimants is not justified and that the N&EC as well as the CB acted fairly throughout the nomination and election process.

These individuals have chosen to devote their time to pursuing dance activities outside of the Chapter. The Chapter has no intention of trying to impede whatever dance interests they choose to participate in and wish these individuals success in their future dance endeavors.

ATTACHMENT #1

Election Notice

It is the goal of each USA Dance Chapter's Election and Nominations Committee to run a fair and unbiased election for the Chapter free of any voting manipulation. Note that USA Dance Bylaws specifically state that Chapters are limited to specific geographic service areas and as such that membership in Chapters is limited to those individuals that reside in those service areas. Furthermore, USA Dance voting members are also required to uphold the ideals, purposes, and functions of USA Dance. As such it is expected that all USA Dance members behave and act in an ethical manner

Unfortunately, our Committee has been made aware that an unusual number of individuals have recently joined the Chapter that are not in the geographic region serviced by Chapter #2011. Consequently, it appears that some individual or group is attempting to manipulate the outcome of Chapter #2011's election. You are receiving this notice since you have been identified as one of the members not residing in USA Dance Chapter #2011 service area. As such you should be aware that the USA Dance Executive Committee has been notified of the large number of individuals joining our Chapter who do not reside in our service area and that an investigation will be initiated in the near future. Since this issue cannot be resolved prior to the election you have the following options available to you:

1. Immediately transfer your membership to your nearest USA Dance Chapter and participate in that Chapter's election. You can identify your nearest chapter by going to: <http://usadance.org/chapters/find-a-local-chapter/>

Once identified you can then notify USA Dance that you wish to immediately transfer your membership to the appropriate Chapter at: <https://dance.site-ym.com/Login.aspx> or by contacting the Central Office at (800) 447-9047.

If you choose this option do not return the enclosed ballot but do vote in your new Chapter. You will not be named in the subsequent investigation. However, we do request that if you were persuaded to join Chapter #2011 that you notify the Committee at the ballot address or at gstroick@comcast.net including any additional factors such as requests to vote for specific candidates, payment of membership fees (directly or indirectly), etc. Please include your name and membership number on your correspondence.

2. Submit the enclosed ballot. If you are active in Chapter #2011 this is the appropriate course of action.

Please note that you will be named in the subsequent investigation and should have no concerns as an active member in the Chapter since this is verifiable through Chapter records. However, the consequences if you are not an active member of Chapter #2011 are difficult to predict. It should be noted that USA Dance does not treat unethical behavior lightly. If you are found to have not acted in accordance with the organization's ideals with respect to this election the consequences may range from no action to membership revocation.

Sincerely,
Chapter #2011 Election and Nomination Committee

ATTACHMENT #2

Let's Work Together to Ensure Ethical Election Behaviors - *By Gary Stroick*

Integrity – Ethics – Morals: these words are rarely used these days, especially when we talk about our leaders whether they're local, national, or international. Yet we all want our leaders to exhibit and live by these qualities. Furthermore, we all expect our leaders to act and behave based on values such as respect for others, fairness, and accountability.

I truly believe in such values and it is my expectation that other leaders in our USA Dance community believe and follow them as well. This is supported not only by the USA Dance Bylaws but also established policies outlining a Code of Ethics; Harassment and Abuse Policies; Neutrality Policies; Conflict of Interest Policies; and so forth.

Unscrupulous Actions

Unscrupulous actions thrive when individuals are intimidated or fear reprisals. By living in the shadows they gain strength and eventually may appear to be unbeatable. However, by shining a light on such actions and submitting a call to action, such unethical behaviors can eventually be minimized or eliminated.

Membership Numbers

Through examination of recent membership numbers it appears as if there is an attempt to manipulate the results of the upcoming election. One may ask how I could make such a provocative statement, so here are the facts.

1. Since December, 2013 the Chapter membership has grown from 98 to 336.
2. Our Chapter now consists of approximately 50 members that do not reside in Minnesota. Almost all of these individuals have joined the Chapter since July 2014. These members live in Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. A large percentage of this group is comprised of individuals from various educational institutions.
3. Our Chapter also has also been joined by about 10 members that do not reside in the metro area but in other parts of Minnesota that have their own local USA Dance Chapter (e.g., Rochester), since July 2014.
4. Our Chapter has had an influx of over 70 members from the University of Minnesota since July 2014; approximately 50 of these in the past four weeks. It should be noted that such an influx did not occur last year but interestingly enough did just prior to the last election in 2012.

What Chapter Do I Join

All members should be aware that in accordance with USA Dance Bylaws, Chapters are organized to support a specific **geographic service area**. Since the service area of our Chapter is the Twin City metro and surrounding area, it should be abundantly clear to everyone reading this that the members identified in items two and three are outside of our Chapter service area.

Historically, members were assigned to a Chapter based on their address; subsequently a second address field was added to the application form in order to allow individuals with two residences to select which Chapter they could join. In recent years USA Dance procedures have allowed members to join a Chapter of their choice. Unless, the member is active in their selected Chapter this is inappropriate behavior in my view. Why? Inactive members have no vested interest in the representation or management of the Chapter. If a member lives outside of a Chapter's geographic service area they should seriously consider whether joining that Chapter is the action of a responsible, ethical member of the USA Dance organization.

Since we as a Chapter cannot support the dance needs of members outside of our geographic service area, you should ask yourself why has such a large group joined our Chapter just prior to an election? Although a few of these members are regular active participants in local Chapter functions most of them are not. For those that are

not active Chapter participants consider the list of reasonable explanations for these individuals joining our Chapter. Balance that against the timing of their membership, followed by the sheer numbers involved. Now decide for yourself the most plausible explanation for their Chapter membership. If you decide that these members are joining our Chapter to affect the outcome of the election then you have one more reason to take action and vote.

Although the Chapter wants and encourages all local dancers to be members we also want them to have a balanced view of what a Chapter does as well as an understanding of USA Dance, including its mission and functions. It should be obvious to the reader that such actions are simply part of being a responsible organizational citizen. A large influx of new local members (almost all within the last few of weeks) hardly gives these members time to obtain such a perspective particularly if they have not had the opportunity to participate in a variety of USA Dance Chapter activities, talk with a diverse set of members to assess differing views, or are unduly influenced by any subset of individuals.

Any election manipulation deprives the active Chapter membership of choosing their leadership. Not only would the manipulation of an election be contrary to the USA Dance Bylaws but would demonstrate a clear lack of respect for the Chapter membership as well as fairness to the Chapter as a whole.

But What Can I Do?

What can you as a USA Dance member do? If you are in the group identified in items two and three above and you do not regularly participate in Chapter #2011 activities you should act ethically and responsibly by immediately transferring your membership to the nearest Chapter that supports your dance needs. You can do this locating your nearest Chapter at <http://usadance.org/chapters/find-a-local-chapter/> and then either login at: <https://dance.site-ym.com/Login.aspx> or contact the Central Office at (800) 447-9047 with your notification of Chapter reassignment.

If you are in the group identified by item four above act as a responsible organizational citizen and take the time to find out about the USA Dance Chapter through a diverse set of sources: go to a USA Dance function, attend a board meeting, talk to the candidates, etc. prior to voting.

The direction of our Chapter is up to you the members. You need to determine who you want to run your Chapter for the next two years based on your understanding of their qualifications and vision for your Chapter. You need to find out what they stand for and whether they are going to fight for these beliefs or succumb to pressure from outside influencers. You also need to ensure that they are going to make decisions that are holistically in the best interest of the Chapter membership.

Vote!

Most of all you need to vote. The Chapter Board will be our representatives and we want our leaders to stand for what is morally right and what is holistically best for our Chapter. As such they need to represent the membership in our entirety and not some unseen special interests.

What is the National USA Dance leadership doing with respect to this issue? The answer is that they have been informed and are beginning to address the situation. The Election and Nominations Committee will be conducting an investigation so if you are aware of any unethical activity, please contact me at:

Gary Stroick, 3600 France Ave. S., St Louis Park, MN 55416. gstroick@comcast.net 952.201.3002

USA Dance Chapter #2011 Member since 1993
Current USA Dance Foreign Agent for Minnesota
Current USA Dance Chapter #2011 Board Member (Appointed)
Former USA Dance Governing Council Member (1997- 2006)
Former USA Dance VP for DanceSport & Executive Committee Member (1999-2006)
Former USA Dance Chapter #2011 VP (1996-1999)

Attachment #3

Board Candidate Interview Questions

1. Will you be able to regularly attend the monthly Board meetings on the second Tuesday of each month?
 - a. If not, how do you justify running for the board with respect to the USA Dance Code of Ethics?
Exercise reasonable care, good faith and due diligence in organizational affairs.
2. Describe the areas where you are willing to support chapter functions (e.g. volunteer coordination, newsletter, monthly dances, etc.).
 - a. What skills and experiences do you bring to support these functions?
3. Why are you running for the Board?
Ask probing questions based on each individual's application.
4. What actions would you take in leading the chapter to accomplish the mission of USA Dance?
 - a. Relate this back to Article II B of the Bylaws which describes 13 separate organizational activities of USA Dance.
5. What experience do you have leading volunteer organizations?
 - a. Provide an example of some action you took that demonstrates good leadership.
 - i. Describe the behavioral traits of a good leader. Provide an example. (e.g., Responsible, accountable, independent thinking, vision, persuasiveness, courage of conviction, open mindedness, and so forth.)
 - ii. Describe the behavioral traits of a poor leader. Provide an example. (e.g., Authoritarian, manipulative, intimidation, closed mindedness, procrastination, and so forth.)