

GENERAL STUDIES STUDENT COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

2016-17 Edition



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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY/SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES

PREAMBLE

We, the General Studies Student Council, shall represent the diverse undergraduate population of the School of General Studies by pursuing academic, social, administrative, and policy initiatives of interest to the student body; shall responsibly manage and distribute their student life fees; shall actively advocate on behalf of students in addressing their implicit and explicit concerns; and shall act as a liaison between the student body and the School of General Studies' administration, the Columbia University community, and other individuals and organizations.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this body shall be the General Studies Student Council, hereafter referred to as the GSSC.

ARTICLE II: MISSION and OBJECTIVES

In order to carry out its mission, the GSSC will have the authority and responsibility to:

- Formulate the budget of the GSSC, according to the provisions outlined in Article VII Section 2
- Distribute earmarked funds from Student Life Fees.
- Express its will through resolutions reflecting and representing the views of the student body.
- Issue reports to the General Studies student body on council activities and efforts. These reports shall include, but not limited to, the meeting minutes and budget updates.
- Establish committees.

ARTICLE III: GENERAL MEMBERSHIP RULES

1. Eligibility

- a. To be eligible to hold a GSSC electable or appointed position, one must:
 - i. Be a student of the School of General Studies (GS) in good standing with the Dean of Students Office.
 - ii. Have and maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5.
 - iii. Remain enrolled as a GS student at least half-time each term in office.
- b. Officers are not eligible to vote on council business until they have been elected by the student body, or appointed and confirmed by the council.

2. Terms of Service

- a. The University Senator will serve an elected term of two consecutive school years, and may serve a third term if reelected.
- b. All other officers shall server a term of one school year.
- c. Officers' terms begin after commencement ceremonies, and all terms end at the following year's commencement ceremonies.
- d. No GSSC officer may simultaneously hold two electable or appointed positions within the GSSC.

3. Code of Conduct

- a. Every member of the GSSC must maintain the highest standard of conduct for the duration of his or her service. Council members will:
 - i. Behave ethically and respectfully in pursuit of official duties.
 - ii. Not abuse their authority in any way
 - iii. Recognize that any disciplinary or legal charges incurred during his or her term of service that comes to the attention of the council could subject the member to disciplinary actions up to and including impeachment.
 - iv. Will not speak or enter into agreement on behalf of the GSSC without explicit consent from relevant members of the council.
- b. A member of the council acknowledges that he or she is representing the GS student body and the university, and that any violation of the GSSC Code of Conduct or the University Code of Conduct will be reported to the Student Life Office and will be considered grounds for impeachment.

4. Attendance and Responsibilities

- a. Every member must attend all council meetings and all other meetings relevant to his or her position.
- b. More than two unexcused absences to any meeting that a member is either expected to or required to attend is grounds for impeachment.
- c. If a council member is absent from a meeting relevant to his or her position, that member will provide all necessary information to keep the GSSC informed, and shall be responsible for staying updated on all pertinent meeting information.
- d. All members must form relationships with the appropriate administrators and members of the other student governing bodies of Columbia University.
- e. Each member must be responsible for the implementation and publicity of events that fall under the jurisdiction of his or her office, which shall include making use of all available resources of the Communications Committee.

ARTICLE IV: ELECTIONS, APPOINTMENTS, SUCCESSION, AND IMPEACHMENT

1. Elections, Appointments, and Succession

- a. The GSSC shall hold annual elections during the spring semester, open to the entire GS student body. In the event that a position is not contested (2 or more eligible candidates) during the spring elections, said position will be filled using an appointment process.
- b. Non-elected voting positions, and positions that become vacant, will be filled by appointment. If the Class President position becomes vacant, the Class Vice President shall succeed to the position of Class President.
- c. If the Student Body President becomes unable or ineligible to perform his or her duties, the line of succession to the position of Student Body President shall be as follows:
 - i. the Vice President of Policy
 - ii. the Vice President of Finance
 - iii. the Vice President of Communications
 - iv. the Vice President of Campus Life

2. Impeachment

- a. Any member of the GSSC who is found to be in violation of the Code of Conduct, gross negligence of duties, attendance policies as stated in Article III Section 4, and/or malfeasance of any kind will be subject to impeachment.
- b. Any Executive Board member may initiate impeachment proceedings. In order for impeachment proceedings to commence, each Executive Board member must receive a brief report from the Student Body President explicitly stating the wrongful actions on the part of the member in question. The member in question has the rough to submit a rebuttal report. Both reports must be distributed to the full council prior to impeachment proceedings.
- c. Once the reports have been reviewed, impeachment proceedings will take place during the council's next scheduled meeting. The member in question has the right to be present for all discussion and will be given the opportunity to defend him- or herself to the full council. A secret ballot will then be taken. If there is a ¾ majority consensus, the member will be dismissed from office.
- d. Alternatively, a member may choose to resign from office prior to the Removal from Office meeting.
- e. A member cannot be impeached twice for the same occurrence of a particular violation.
- f. Impeachment results are final and are not subject to appeal.

ARTICLE V: OFFICER ROLES

1. Officers

- a. The Student Body President shall:
 - i. Uphold the Constitution and ensure that its mandate is faithfully executed by the GSSC.
 - ii. Serve as the primary spokesperson for the GSSC and GS student body by maintaining relationships with university administrators and other student governments significant to the experience of the GS student body.
 - iii. Set the framework for achieving goals that work towards the benefit of the general student body.
 - iv. Chair the meetings of the GSSC, voting only in the event of a tie.
 - v. Chair the weekly meetings of the Executive Board.
 - vi. Sit on the board for funding at Columbia University, herein known as F@CU.
- b. The Vice President of Policy shall:
 - i. Chair and oversee the Policy Committee.
 - ii. Coordinate and implement policy initiatives related but not limited to:
 - 1. academic services
 - 2. student services
 - 3. financial aid
 - 4. housing
 - iii. Fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the Student Body President in the event the president is unable to fulfill these duties.
 - iv. Have explicit knowledge of the GSSC Constitution, and arbitrate questions pertaining to constitutional procedures that may arise in GSSC meetings.

- c. The Vice President of Finance shall:
 - i. Chair and oversee the Finance Committee.
 - ii. Administer and monitor the budget of the GSSC, according to the provisions outlined in Article VII Section 2 of the GSSC Constitution.
 - iii. Maintain and make accessible detailed records of revenues, expenditures, and encumbrances of the GSSC; submit a clear financial summary to the GSSC each week.
 - iv. Advise student organizations about GSSC financial procedures and allocations.
 - v. Uphold inter-group relations concerning budgetary and funding issues with the other councils and governing boards.
 - vi. Maintain a presence on the appropriate governing boards as outlined in the bylaws, keeping the GSSC abreast of relevant issues.
 - vii. Attend the four-council treasures meetings.
 - viii. Sit on the F@CU board.
- d. The Vice President of Communication shall:
 - i. Chair and oversee the Communications Committee.
 - ii. Oversee and facilitate communications within the GSSC, to the GS student body, and to the wider university population.
 - iii. Ensure that meeting minutes and attendance are taken at weekly GSSC meetings, and are made available to the student body.
 - iv. Maintain the database of meeting attendance. If excessive absences of a member have been recorded, that member, in addition to the Student Body President, must be notified.
 - v. Ensure publicity of the GSSC and students event to the student body, through necessary forms of publicity, including, but not limited to, sending out the ongoing GSSC weekly bulletin.
- e. The Vice President of Campus Life shall:
 - i. Chair and oversee the Campus Life Committee.
 - ii. Assist other GSSC members in planning events.
 - iii. Oversee and coordinate GSSC-sponsored events.
 - iv. Develop and present a program of expected events, and shall present the program to the GSSC by the second meeting of each semester.
- f. The University Senator shall:
 - i. Represent the entire GS student body in the University Senate
 - ii. Participate in Senate committees whose issues affect the GS student body.
 - iii. Submit a report of Senate activities pertinent to the GS student body at GSSC weekly meetings.
 - iv. Sit on the Policy Committee.
- g. The Senior Class President shall:
 - i. Organize, chair, and oversee a Senior Class Committee, when needed.
 - ii. Provide opportunities for senior GS students to come together for class-specific social and educational purposes.
 - iii. Encourage interaction between the senior class and current alumni.
 - iv. Uphold relations with the Senior Class Presidents from other councils.
 - v. Coordinate the Senior Gift Fund.
 - vi. Cooperate with the Student Life Office to plan and execute commencement activities and other senior

- h. The Senior Class Vice-President shall:
 - i. Assist the Senior Class President with his or her advocacy and programming responsibilities.
 - ii. Assume the Senior Class President's responsibilities in his or her absence.
- **2.** All other voting officer positions and their duties, as well as any additional duties of the positions outlined above, are defined in Article II of the By-laws.
- **3.** All electable and appointed officers shall:
 - i. Be expected to provide a report of their specific activities at the weekly GSSC meeting
 - ii. Assist the transition of future council members by providing advice and important contacts to new members.

ARTICLE VI: MEETINGS AND COMMITTEES

1. Council Meetings

- a. The GSSC shall meet weekly while fall and spring semester classes are in session.
- b. A quorum must be present to hold any vote.
 - i. A quorum shall be defined as 2/3 of all eligible voting members of the GSSC, including the Student Body President.
 - ii. If officers choose to abstain from a vote, they are still counted towards the quorum.
- c. The GSSC shall have the authority to adopt rules governing meeting procedures in accordance with the needs and circumstances of each year's council. unless proposed rules contradict the constitution.
- d. All meetings of the GSSC shall be open to the public. The Student Body President retains the right to initiate any closed discussion or vote within the course of a meeting; however, he or she may be overruled by a majority vote of the council. If the council is voting on the confirmation of a new officer, the GSSC meeting must be temporarily closed.

2. Committees

- a. The standing committees of the GSSC are the following:
 - i. Policy
 - ii. Finance
 - iii. Communications
 - iv. Student Events
- b. The council may also create non-standing committees that can include appointed members of the GS student body. These committees are intended to engage the student body in the achievement of council goals. All non-standing committees will serve at the discretion of the Executive Board. When a committee's assigned task is accomplished, or if the committee has not proven efficient, the Board will dismiss the committee from service with a majority vote. Non-standing committees whose work is not completed by the end of the academic year will automatically be terminated, but may be reinstated by the relevant Vice President at the beginning of the following school year.
- c. Committees will meet weekly, with the schedule and expected attendance at the discretion of the committee chair.
- d. Committees will be chaired by the relevant Vice President or by a council member appointed by the relevant Vice President.
- e. Non-Vice President council members may establish a committee by appealing to the relevant Vice President.

f. Committee members will be appointed at the discretion of the committee chair, and approved by a simple majority of the Executive Board.

ARTICLE VII: EXECUTIVE BOARD AND BUDGET

1. Executive Board

- a. The Student Body President, the Vice President of Policy, the Vice President of Campus Life, the Vice President of Finance, and the Vice President of Communications shall form the Executive Board of the GSSC. The Executive Board shall:
 - i. Hold weekly meetings.
 - ii. Set council meeting agendas.
 - iii. Mediate inter-council conflicts.
 - iv. Serve in an advisory role to the rest of the GSSC
- b. If performance of a council member does not meet the standards set forth in the Constitution, the Executive Board has the responsibility to speak to that member about fulfilling his or her responsibilities. If it is determined that the member continues to be delinquent in his or her responsibilities, the Executive Board will ask that member to resign or undergo impeachment hearings.
- c. While items for the agenda are set by the Executive Board, any six members of the council who wish to put an item onto the agenda may do so. If that item is voted down, then six different members of the council must support it to bring it back onto the agenda.
- d. The Vice Presidents shall carry the additional responsibility of assisting the Student Body President in the fulfillment of his or her duties.

2. Budget

- a. The budget shall be defined as money remaining after allocations have been made to the governing boards.
- b. By the second GSSC meeting of the fall semester, the Vice President of Finance shall present a preliminary budget for the year, which shall detail the precise monetary allocation to each class, committee, or other fund. The budget must be ratified by a ¾ majority of the council.
- c. The budget spend on student events shall include social, academic, and pre-professional, with minimum percentages defined in the By-laws.
- d. All expenditures are subject to voting limitations outlined in the By-laws.
- e. Funds for four-council events or other external (non-GSSC primary-sponsored) expenditures must be approved by a simple majority vote of the quorum, regardless of the amount of the expenditure. This vote must include a maximum allocated expenditure that cannot be exceeded with an additional 2/3 vote of the quorum. The council must approve such expenditures before any funds are promised to external sources, and within a timeline set at the discretion of the Vice President of Finance.
- f. Every expense is subject to the review and veto of either the Vice President of Finance or the Student Body President. In the case of financing an event, a veto must be based on the expense, and not on the event itself. If either vetoes an expense, it cannot be overturned without a ¾ majority of the quorum.
- g. The Vice President of Finance and the Vice President of Campus Life shall cooperate to set a reasonable timeline and programming process before any expenditure is made.
- h. The Executive Board shall maintain a discretionary fund, the size of which will be determined by the full council at the beginning of the year. No money may be spent from this fund contrary to a GSSC decision in that same year.

ARTICLE VIII: SUPREMACY OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 1. This Constitution, including the articles and amendments contained within, is the absolute authority in all matters pertaining to the good governance of the GSSC.
- **2.** The responsibilities and duties of all members and bodies of the student council are derived from this Constitution and By-laws.
- 3. This Constitution is a sovereign document and, as such, no amendment or article may be removed but merely amended. To amend this Constitution, the Vice President of Policy shall form a committee that shall include at least one administrator. Any amendment muse be passed by 4/5 majority of the quorum. All amendment changes are subject to rejection by ballot measure if a majority of the student body protests the amendment.
- **4.** Rules detailing the day-to-day operations of the GSSC shall be codified in the By-laws. By-laws are always subservient to the Constitution and shall not be used to circumvent the intent of the Constitution. Creation of or changes in the By-laws require only a 3/5 majority of council members to be ratified for use, and are not subject to review by the student body.
- **5.** Constitutional amendments shall take effect at the commencement ceremonies following their approval. By-law changes take effect immediately upon being approved.