



# Constitution Essentials

For Departmental Student Union, Faculty Student Union  
and Constituency Group Executives

Updated June 30, 2015  
SFSS Organiser Office

# The Constitution

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Every Departmental Student Union of the Simon Fraser Student Society has an existing Constitution to guide its members in decision-making, elections, procedures and structural change. The Constitution provides a permanent reference for the membership. When altering a Student Union Constitution, consideration of the long-term effects on the membership should be taken into consideration.

## Copies of Constitutions

The Student Union Organising Office has copies of existing Constitutions on file. Please contact us for a copy of your constitution or if you need any help amending it (MBC 2238, [organiser@sfss.ca](mailto:organiser@sfss.ca)).

## Amending The Constitution

Constitutions may be amended according to the wishes of the membership.

### Step one:

Give adequate notice to the membership advertising the meeting where constitutional amendments will take place.

### Step two:

Send proposed amendments to the Organiser at [organiser@sfss.ca](mailto:organiser@sfss.ca) for initial feedback- it might save time in the long run!

### Step three:

Hold the meeting. A two third majority vote is required to pass constitutional change. Ensure changes are consistent with the overall language and term of SFSS constitution.

### Step four:

Send the version of the Constitution that is approved by the membership to the Organiser for final ratification

## Ratification of the Constitution

Ideally, the student union or constituency group should send the changes to the Organiser before the membership votes. This way, the Organiser can assist with correcting any disallowed amendments before the membership votes. To ratify the Constitution, send the version that was approved by the membership to [organiser@sfss.ca](mailto:organiser@sfss.ca).

## Basic Elements of the Constitution

### Format

Although the SFSS provides a template for each Departmental Student Union constitution, it is within your right and responsibilities to personalize the Constitution as you see fit. Earth Science doesn't have a Treasurer, they have a "Pebble Counter"; Business has the longest constitution on file because of detailed job descriptions, etc. Your constitution is a working document; so make it work for your group.

Below is a guideline for student union to develop a constitution to guide its member in decision-making, elections, procedures and structural changes. By developing a strong constitution, it would provide the membership a permanent and lasting reference

### Name

The name should directly reflect the departmental or academic affiliation of the membership. "Simon Fraser Student Society" must preface the name of the organization in which a bank account is registered. Some of the names of SFSS Departmental Student Union include: Economics Student Society, Physics Students Association, Political Science Student Union, etc.

### Objectives

Objectives vary with the focus of the Union, but should always include a clause relating to the role of the Union at department & university levels to represent its members' interests. This clause must be built into the Objectives section: "the aims and objectives of the union shall be consistent with those of the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS) Constitution & policies."

### The objectives of most Student Unions are as follows:

1. To promote activities that foster learning in areas of academic study relevant to their field of study
2. To provide an organization to represent the academic welfare and interests of its members, to promote and represent student interests on campus and within the SFSS as a whole
3. To democratically undertake projects and activities to benefit the members
4. The aims and objectives of the union shall be consistent with those of the Simon Fraser Student Society.

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## Membership

Union membership automatically extends to all majors, minors and honors in a department, as well as to any student enrolled in a departmental class in any given semester. The typical clauses used are:

1. Automatic membership in the Student Union shall be extended to all students registered in this department's classes or in the Major, Minor, or Honors program.



## Typical Executive Structure and Responsibilities

This is the section where all executive and representative positions are listed, and a job description outlined for each one, including requirements for reporting back to the membership. Councilor, and Departmental Committee Representatives are typically included here. Sometimes, groups include Social Coordinators, Website Managers, Outreach Coordinators, etc.

## There is usually a guiding or core Executive Committee consisting of:

1. President / Co-Presidents; Chair/ Co-Chairs
2. Secretary / VP Communications Coordinator Role
3. Treasurer / VP Finance Role
4. Special Events Coordinator
5. University Relations Coordinator
6. Departmental Committee Representatives
7. Councillor

## The Responsibilities of the Executive Committee shall be to:

1. Officially represent members
2. Convene all necessary meetings, giving proper notice to the membership
3. Ensure that the membership is kept informed of all matters affecting the group
4. Conduct the day-to-day operations of the group

5. Initiate project and/or appoint members to undertake special projects as required.

## The Duties of the Executive Members:

Normally, each constitution outlines the responsibilities of each of these roles in detail. Below are summary of duties of each officers.

### The Chair/President's Duties:

Preparation of agendas for and chairing of all General and Executive Committee Meeting, coordination and continuity of activities within the group, acting as primary liaison with the School and coordination of all executive committee efforts

### The Secretary's Duties:

Record all minutes of meetings, receive and file all written communications, committee reports, and electronic communications specific to the internal functioning, coordinate all forms of campus advertisement, liaise with the SFSS Student Union Organiser and be responsible for maintaining and updating the website and email lists.

### The Treasurer's Duties:

Keep records of allocation of Union funds, report on the financial state of the Union to the Executive and General Meetings, and present a budget at the General Meeting each semester, be in charge of coordinating all financial aspects of the group's fund-raising initiatives and events plus be responsible for the submission of all grant proposals and funding requests be they to the SFSS, or to outside institutions

### The Special Events Coordinator's Duties:

To coordinate and direct special events including, but not limited to, guest speakers, debates, trips, and socials, and shall be responsible for all room bookings, catering, and sponsorship and to liaise with the executive committee to coordinate all aspects of events planning that fall under other executive jurisdiction.

### The University/External Relations Coordinator's Duties:

To liaise with clubs and student unions on campus that share interests, values and objectives with the group, to liaise with the SFSS on Constitutional matters, and matters of university regulation as regards the group, and to act as official liaison when coordinating events with the department when possible and/or necessary.

### The Departmental Committee Representative's Duties:

Attend such Departmental or Faculty Committees as exist with voting or non-voting student representative's seats on

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them, as specified by the Faculty, Department, or Program constitution, to report on the business of the Committees on which representatives sit, to the Executive and to the membership at general meetings on a regular basis, to take the direction of the general membership in attending to the business of the Committee to accomplish the aims and interests of the Union and to notify the membership of student vacancies on the Committee.

## **The Councilor's Duties:**

Consult with and take the direction of the general membership concerning the issues and business before Council, to represent the best interests of the Union and liaise between the SFSS and the Student Union and to attend all Simon Fraser Student Society's Council meetings.

## **Signing Officers**

Each constitution will delegate signing officers, and notify the SFSS of the signers. These people are authorized to requisition reimbursements, book rooms, order audio/visual equipment on campus, etc.

## **Meeting Frequency and Notice Period**

### **Meetings**

Minutes shall be recorded for all meetings. General Meetings are specified in the constitution for how many meetings happen each semester, how notice of that meeting is given to the campus community, and how an individual student can petition for a meeting individually if the Executive fails to call a meeting. There should be a minimum of three general meetings per semester, but Unions are encouraged to schedule meetings every two weeks during classes. This helps to build an active membership and maintain momentum. The standard period for a notice of meeting is one week, or 5 working days.

Notice should be posted in the PEAK; through social media; through posters in the department, in classrooms and in the Union's common room; on the A.V. monitors, and on Union email lists as membership builds. Elections, Constitutional amendments, and funding or planning discussions must always be indicated on the notice of meeting.

Annual General Meetings are specified in the constitution in the same way. Annual General Meetings are often the "election" meetings.

Executive Committee Meetings for most groups are the regular, weekly meetings. Some groups choose to have weekly General Meetings instead of weekly Executive meetings.

## **Quorum**

Quorum is the minimum number of members that must be present in order for a meeting to be considered legitimate. The number cannot be so low as to defeat the democratic decision-making structure of the Union, but shouldn't be so high as to discourage active membership from taking initiatives. Quorum is typically set between 3 to 10 members.

## **Conduct of all Meetings:**

The Chair shall adopt Robert's Rules of Order. Proxy votes are not allowed, including electronic balloting. Voting on any motion or in any internal election must be done at a meeting called for that purpose, and be done by either a show of hands, or by secret ballot on the request of any member. A sign-in list must be kept at the meeting and be appended to the minutes of the meeting. It shall include names of all voters. Members' e-mail addresses may be included with their permission.



## **Terms of Office, Executive Appointments, and General Elections**

### **Terms of Office of the Executive Committee**

Terms of office are elected for one year. All Executive Committee members must run for re-election if they wish to pursue terms beyond their first term. Any members in good standing of the group are eligible for positions on the Executive Committee.

### **General Elections**

This section indicates when elections are regularly called. The SFSS recommends that, for those Unions electing officers annually, the election should be held towards the end of the spring semester, with the placement of new officers effective May 1st. For Unions whose membership frequently rotates due to Co-op Ed terms or a short program period, semesterly elections may be a better alternative. In all cases, the outgoing Chair or President should report the names and email addresses of the new officers and signing authorities to the Student Union Organiser.

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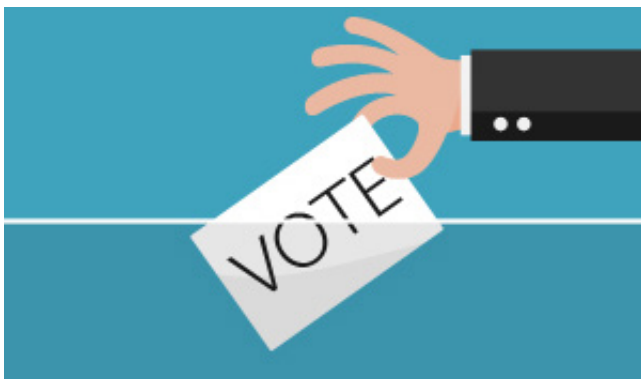
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Election is typically by majority vote, either by a show of hands or by secret ballot, on request of members. Positions vacated before April 30th may be filled by by-election, with a notice given as for annual or semester elections. A Student Union can elect a Councilor when the position becomes vacant or is not filled in the SFSS spring general election, but this representative cannot be removed from office except under the relevant terms of the SFSS Constitution. See the "Electing a Councilor" section or handout for more information about electing a Councilor. Below are your typical clauses under the election term of reference:

1. Elections for Executive Committee shall take place at the AGM each year. The notice of meeting shall contain notice of elections. Nominations are open until the election is conducted.
2. All voting for elected positions shall be by secret ballot, with the person receiving a majority vote being elected. If there is no majority, the person receiving the fewest votes shall be eliminated, and a new vote shall be held.
3. The members may recall any person elected to represent them by a two-thirds vote of the members present at a quorate meeting called for this purpose. Notice of the meeting shall contain the purpose.
4. In the event that all positions are not filled during the annual election, or a representative resigns her/his seat before the full term is served, including that of Councilor, an election shall take place at the next scheduled general meeting.
5. Notice of this meeting shall include notice of the election.

## Recall

All constitutions have provision for Recalling Executive members who are not fulfilling their duties. The exception is the recall of a Councilor, who is governed by the SFSS bylaws instead.



## Amendments to this Constitution

This Constitution may be amended by a 2/3rds majority of the members present and voting at a quorate general meeting called for the purpose.

Follow the provisions in your existing constitution to amend it; it requires a minimum of one weeks' written notice, and notice of where copies of the amendments can be readily obtained. Amendments approved by the membership must be ratified by the SFSS Student Union Organiser before they can be put into effect or included in the official constitution of the Union.

## Dissolution

Every Union constitution must contain the specific wording of dissolution clauses, which relate to the reversion of all Union assets to the Simon Fraser Student Society after a period of two years of inactivity in the Union. Below is a typical clause used in the constitution.

1. This article shall not be altered except with the prior written consent of the Simon Fraser Student Society.
2. In the event that the Union becomes inactive, all assets of the Union revert to the Simon Fraser Student Society, to be held in trust for a minimum period of two years. For the purpose of this article, the Student Union shall have be deemed inactive if the membership does not hold the minimum number of quorate general meetings as required by this constitution for two consecutive semesters.
3. If the Union is regenerated to represent the interests of students within the Program/Department/School during this period, the trust shall be dissolved and all assets shall be at the direct disposal of the Union.
4. If the trust has not been dissolved after two years, the Simon Fraser Student Society may redistribute the assets as it sees fit.

## Ratification

To come into effect, this Constitution requires ratification by the Simon Fraser Student Society's Student Union Organiser.

Note: This is a modified example of a sample Student Union Constitution. Please contact the Student Union Organiser Office at [organiser@sfss.ca](mailto:organiser@sfss.ca) if you are considering starting a new student union or amending the constitution.