

Briefing Note: Base Democratic Requirements

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PURPOSE

Provide base democratic requirements across student unions and constituency groups recognized by the SFSS. This will require changes to SFSS policies and bylaws, therefore if these standards are to take effect before the start of most student group general elections, then some work and planning will need to occur. As well, student groups will need support with amending their constitutions and bylaws.

BACKGROUND

The SFSS merged and restructured their Board of Directors and Council together for May 1st, 2021. And now the Council is the Board of Directors. Since then, as the VP Internal and Organizational Development, I've worked with execs and staff to oversee and coordinate Councilor registration, onboarding, training, and other matters. During this period, students sometimes bring issues to me about student group elections. Some issues raised were in how student leaders were elected (or not), inconsistent or absent notification requirements, and other issues. In most cases, while I agreed with their concerns, the actions were inline with the SFSS's bylaws and policies. In reviewing these bylaws and policies, I found gaps and small errors. This is not surprising due to the number of changes that have been made over the last few years. So, making a number of follow-up fixes is not a bad thing.

CURRENT STATUS

SFSS Policies

The Member Service and Group Policies need to be amended to include these standards. This policy mostly focuses on funding rules including core, grant, and travel funding. It also covers some governance rules like inactivity, reporting requirements, and eligibility for funding.

The recommended policy changes focus around open governance and transparency. These changes include

- A requirement that meetings be open to members
- In-camera rules
- Election and by-election member notification and duration requirements
- SFSS notification
- SFSS IEC Support
- Communication channels

The recommended policy changes do not prevent a student union or constituency group from appointing temporary executives until a general or by-election. It also does not affect the composition, positions, or duties of executives.

The recommended policy changes do not affect affiliated student groups because they are groups that are independent of the SFSS.

SFSS Bylaws

SFSS Bylaws will need to be changed as well to reflect these standards. These changes include:

- Elections and notification requirements for Student Unions and CGs
- Allowing for temporary appointments between elections and by-elections of the student group

RECOMMENDED POLICY CHANGES

Member Group Policy

Amend MGP-3

Constituency Group Base Governance Requirement

3.18 General Meetings and Executive meetings of each constituency group must be open to its members. The constitution and bylaws of the constituency group shall reflect this requirement.

- a) Any constituency executive body or its membership may vote to go In-Camera by at least two-thirds majority present and voting as long as they follow the guidelines in a manner akin to the SFSS in-camera policies

3.19 Elections and By-elections within a constituency group must be in line with their Constitution and Bylaws as well as the SFSS Bylaws and Regulation

- a) voting must be open to its members (or classes of members for positions representing classes of members) with at least one week's notice of election or by-election sent to its members

- b) a Constituency Group must inform the SFSS including the Member Services Coordinator - Unions and Student Groups and VP Internal and Organizational Development at least two weeks before the election or by-election
- c) SFSS Independent Electoral Commission, if it exists, are able to provide support and advice to the constituency group if requested
- d) constituency groups may appoint a member temporarily into an executive position until the next by-election is held. Every effort must be made to have vacancies filled.
- e) election and by-election notice must be given via the constituency group's communication channels to ensure fair and democratic participation with its members.
- d) Communication channels may include but are not limited to:
 - i) Social media
 - ii) Website
 - iii) Member mailing list
 - iv) Other electronic communication

MGP-4

Student Union Base Governance Requirements

4.27 General Meetings and Executive meetings of each student union must be open to its members. The constitution and bylaws of the student union shall reflect this requirement.

- a) Any student union executive body or it's membership may vote to go In-Camera by at least two-thirds majority present and voting as long as they follow the guidelines in a manner akin to the SFSS in-camera policies

4.28 Elections and By-elections within a student union must be in line with their Constitution and Bylaws as well as the SFSS Bylaws and Regulation

- a) voting must be open to its members (or classes of members for positions representing classes of members) with at least one week's notice of election or by-election sent to its members
- b) a Student Union must inform the SFSS including the Member Services Coordinator - Unions and Student Groups and VP Internal and Organizational Development at least two weeks before the election or by-election
- c) SFSS Independent Electoral Commission, if it exists, are able to provide support and advice to the student union if requested
- d) student unions may appoint a member temporarily into an executive position until the next by-election is held. Every effort must be made to have vacancies filled.

e) election and by-election notice must be given via the student union communication channels to ensure fair and democratic participation with its members.

d) Communication channels may include but is not limited to:

- i) Social media
- ii) Website
- iii) Member mailing list
- iv) Other electronic communication

RECOMMENDED BYLAW CHANGES

Going with the renumbered bylaws as passed at the SFSS 2021 AGM, the following changes should be made.

Bylaw 8 - Student Unions

Add 8(d) Holds elections and byelections for executive positions where voting is open to its members (or to a group of members for positions specifically representing that group of members) with at least one week's advance notice. This shall be reflected in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Student Union..

Bylaw 15 - Resignation, Impeachment, and Abandonment

Amend 15(9)(a): "of by-election or interim appointment in accordance with their respective Student Union or Constituency Group Constitution and By-Laws, and Society Bylaws and Regulation."

Bylaw 10 - Constituency Groups

Add 10(d) Holds elections and byelections for executive positions where voting is open to its members (or to a group of members for executive positions specifically representing that group of members) with at least one week's advance notice. This shall be reflected in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Constituency Group

Bylaw Clean Up

Bylaw 13(13) - Elections

Remove "the day" in bylaw 13(13)

Bylaw 8 - Student Unions

Remove "unrecognized" in Bylaw 8

TIMELINE

Once approved by Council, the policy document can be updated by the Policy, Research, and Community Affairs Coordinator and then uploaded to the website by the Communications Coordinator.

Student groups will then need to be contacted to start the process to update their constitutions and bylaws (if needed) to reflect the new policy requirements. The Member Services Coordinator - Student Union and Groups can provide support. This will need to be completed before the March Council elections.

For Bylaws changes, Council or Executive Committee can submit resolutions for the spring referendum to be voted on by the membership. If quorum is met and the resolutions pass, then the Member Services Coordinator - Student Unions and Groups can provide support for affected student groups to amend their constitution and bylaws.

APPENDIX

[Member Service & Group Policies](#)