**Reference Guide to Creating a Student Groups Constitution**

The purpose of a Student Groups Constitution is to ensure that the Group has a structure in place for selecting individuals to act on behalf and for the mandate of the Group. Having a well-crafted Constitution encourages a sustainable and stable Group that can maintain its activities from one year to the next with limited downtime due to learning curves, lack of clarity, uncertain process, or perceived/actual unfairness in selection of executives.

The Constitution does these things by setting out the executive officer positions of the Group, how the positions are filled, as well as roles and responsibilities of each position. By doing so, the individuals fulfilling these roles benefit from having a set of clear and consistent duties, which makes it easier for them to do the best job possible for the Group.

Each section of the Constitution should be clear, concise, and relevant to the Group’s own chosen structure, environment, and activities. There is no need to make it unnecessarily complicated or obscure. Any Group member should be able to understand the Constitution.

**The Constitution MUST contain the following elements:**

* Name and acronym if any
* Mandate (the purpose of the group)
* Membership (who is a member, membership categories)
* Meetings of Membership (frequency, quorum, procedures for full Group meetings and meetings of the Group executive)
* Composition of Group Executive (positions, eligibility)
* Roles and Responsibilities of Executive Officers (duties)
* Election of Executive Officers (when, election format, nominations, term length, dealing with vacancies)
* Removal of Executive Officers (when, why, how)

**The Constitution MAY contain the following elements:**

* Group Advisor / Delegates (roles, selection)
* Affiliations (eg. MacEwan chapter of other organizations)
* Finances (membership fees, if any; signing authorities; budget/expense requirements)
* Amendment (process)
* Closure (process, responsibility)

There are many different and legitimate ways of organizing a group and running meetings. Organizational structure is not ‘one size fits all’. Determine first how the group will fulfill its mandate and through what sort of activities. Having an idea of what the group will be doing can help identify the executive positions that will support these aims. Feel free to consult the Student Group Department with any questions or big ideas to do with the structure and operation of the Group. We can help you find something that works for your Group.

**Article 1 - Name**
Identify the official name of the Group and the preferred acronym if there is one.

Names are subject to requirements set by SAMU Student Groups Procedure which can be found at: <https://samu.ca/about/bylaws-policy-procedures/>

Student Groups are not permitted to use the word “association,” “society,” or “union” in their name

Name changes must be provided to the Manager of Student Groups for approval.

**Article 2 - Mandate**
This comes from the objectives approved in the group’s initial application or from subsequent changes that have been approved by members. These are the reasons the Group was formed and continues to operate. The Groups activities and events should always work towards achieving the aims set out in the Group’s mandate. If your Group’s focus has changed, the members should be consulted, and the mandate updated if appropriate.

**Article 3 - Membership**
Only MacEwan University students may be members of a Student Group.

Alumni, students at other institutions, community partners, advisory members, professional resources, affiliates, and associate members may only participate in group activities as guests.

Membership in groups must be open to all students. Each group should maintain a membership list that is kept confidential. This helps the group communicate with members about business and various events or activities, and to let them know about any executive position opportunities and selections. Make sure the list is not abused and promptly remove anyone who requests to be taken off.

**Article 4 - Meetings**

* **General meeting** – meeting of members to make formal decisions (such as executive elections) for the group or get feedback on certain topics.

General meetings of the group are for decision-making and consultation. Someone should be responsible for the smooth running of the meeting, typically the president. Someone, typically the secretary, should take notes and make sure that votes and decisions are recorded. General meetings are for specific purposes relating to things such as the running or structure of the group.

* **Executive meeting** – meeting of executives to manage the Group.
* **Regular meeting** – typically the main activity of the group to gather and do whatever it does; this could be things such as the weekly or monthly gatherings for socializing or chosen discussion topics with guests.

**Voting Thresholds**
The group can also determine what form of decision-making best suits the group and their members’ preferences. Most commonly, these include simple majority and consensus. There are many other approaches, so if you want to take a different route, the Student Groups Department can help you find something that fits.

**Article 5 – Composition of Group Executives**
The executive officers are the students who provide leadership and manage the group. A lot of different structures and roles are possible, but it is important that each person who is an executive officer knows the role and responsibilities for the position. It can be useful to keep duties general in the Constitution and then expand on each position in a separate job profile. This approach allows for a good amount of flexibility to update the job profile when needed, without necessarily needing to change the Constitution.

Executive officers should always be recruited/elected according to the group’s Constitution. They are also responsible in general to make sure they and the group are following the Constitution and the various relevant policies and procedures of SAMU and MacEwan University. The Student Group Department is available to help with anything that might be confusing in this regard, as well as to help give direction or facilitate a discussion if an executive team experiences difficulty at any time.

For administrative purposes, there should always be a president, vice- president, treasurer, and secretary identified. If different names are used for these functions, make it clear that these duties are being maintained. To help with processing finances, groups are encouraged to designate five people as signing authorities. These people could be additional executives who have another portfolio of duties, such as a VP Communications, or may simply be a signing authority only.

Not everyone involved in the operations of the group needs to be an executive or signing authority; doing so can sometimes create problems and confusion. A situation of ‘too many cooks in the kitchen’ can develop. It is fine to have people contribute to designated volunteer roles (such as an event planner or social media coordinator) that do only those things on the direction of the executive and membership.

**Sample Executive Officer Positions**

* **President**

To oversee the development of the group, foster group unity, preside at all meetings and ensure that the group functions properly, follows procedures and meets its obligations.

* **Vice President**

To assist the President in running the group and to act as the President if they are unable to fulfill their role. This position helps to foster group unity.

* **Vice President Events**

To ensure that all required SAMU paperwork is completed regarding event approvals. This is the person who communicates with the Student Groups department regarding all aspects of any event.

* **Secretary**

To record meeting minutes, distribute minutes to all group members, update group contact information and maintain a secure, accurate membership list.

* **Treasurer**

To receive all student groups' monies and deposit them into the group's account. To ensure all cheque requisitions are completed correctly and have the appropriate documentation attached. The Treasurer is also responsible for ensuring that the account balance is correct and that any grants received are accounted for.

**Sample Alternative/Additional Executive Officer Positions**

* VP Communications VP Internal
* VP External
* VP Finance
* VP Events
* VP Administration VP Fundraising

**Sample Duties and Responsibilities for Executive Officers**

* General leadership and guidance
* Member recruitment
* Fundraising
* Budgeting
* Deposits
* Expenditures
* Record keeping
* Preparing and distributing agenda for meetings
* Event organizing
* Updating changes to executives/signing authorities
* Communications (incoming, outgoing – members, outgoing – others)
* Website maintenance
* social media
* Reporting requirements
* Designated liaison (Student Groups Department/SAMU, faculty, university department, external community/organizations)
* Regular programming/activity coordination
* Official delegates for affiliate organizations
* Volunteer coordination/management

**Article 6 – Election of Executive Officers**
Election of executive officers can take many forms. The most important aspect of electing executive officers is to make sure it is an open, transparent, and participatory process that involves the whole membership. It doesn’t need to be extravagant or overly complicated. Members should know what the process is and be aware of the opportunity to both be a candidate and contribute to the selection of candidates.

Types of elections can include:

* Affirmative vote
* Preferential ballot
* Slate nominee confirmation
* Acclamation

Groups may apply nomination criteria for candidates such as an application/letter of interest, minimum prior membership duration, shadowing of current executives, etc.

**Article 7 – Removal of Executive Officers**

If an executive has not been fulfilling their role, the removal process for executive officers should be addressed in the group’s Constitution so that conflict can be minimized as much as possible.

Before an executive is removed, they should be given the opportunity to address any concerns that have been raised against them. If the majority of the group still feels the executive should be removed, the group may advance with the removal and elect another executive.

**Article 8 - Official Delegate / Article 10 - Affiliation**
If the group is a part of a larger organization, the group’s relationship with the other organization should be identified. If the group has delegate selection responsibilities or roles/voting privileges otherwise, it is good to determine how these things will be handled.

**Article 9 - Student Groups Advisor**
Some Groups may find it beneficial to have an advisor. These positions are filled by staff/faculty members at the university. Having an advisor can help groups gain access to additional expertise, especially about specific industries, or subject disciplines, that can make it easier for the group to fulfill its mandate. Advisors should take a supporting role; the group members should still make the decisions.

**Note:** it is the group’s responsibility to reach out to and obtain an advisor, if they chose to.

**Article 11 - Finances**
All finances are held through SAMU’s accounting system. The finance section of the Constitution reaffirms this requirement. It can also be used to address any other financial matters, such as keeping a target minimum balance for the following year. If the group assesses a membership fee, the details of how much the fee is, when it is to be paid, and by whom, should be noted here.

**Article 12 - Amendment**
As a group evolves, grows, or shifts focus, it may find that certain parts of the Constitution should be updated. These updates are done by following the Constitution’s amendment process. Whatever process is decided, it needs to be followed for the amendment to be valid. The Student Group Department needs to be provided with the updated Constitution, and the new version does not have effect until it is approved by the department.

The process should be selected so there is a thorough and open consultation procedures. It should also strike a balance between being flexible enough to change and being reserved so that the Constitution is not changed too frequently or on a whim. Because the Constitution guides the overall structure of the group, it is important to engage the full membership of the group on Constitutional matters. Support can be made available to facilitate that kind of consultation if your group would benefit from it.

**Article 13 - Closure**
Setting out a closure process for the group allows for a smooth winding down to take place. It helps the final group of executive officers to know what needs to be done and how to go about doing it to wrap up the Group’s last items of business.

**Student Groups Constitution Template**

**Note:** Please use the following template to help build your groups Constitution

**Constitution for [Group name]**

**Article 1 – Name**

The Student Group’s official name will be ‘[Group name]’ [acronym in parenthesis if applicable]. No other name will be used in the advertisement or representation of the group. Changes to the group’s official name will be submitted to the Student Group Department for approval.

**Article 2 – Mandate**

The purpose of the group is [list of objectives from the group’s approved mandate].

**Article 3 – Membership**

Membership is open to all students of MacEwan University.

Membership is only open to current MacEwan University Students. Non-MacEwan University students may participate in group activities as guests.

**Article 4 – Meetings**

At least one general meeting will be held in each fall and winter term. Notice of a general meeting will be provided by email to members at least seven days in advance of the meeting.

Quorum for general meetings is [choose a number of members required to be in attendance to conduct business and make decisions]. Voting will be done by simple majority approval.

If quorum is not achieved for a general meeting, the group executive may take a vote for a particular decision or business item, with the exception of elections.

The group executive will meet on a regular basis to lead and manage the group. Quorum for group executive meetings requires at least [select how many] executive officers to be present. The group executive will operate on a [simple majority/consensus *(select one as appropriate)*] decision-making model.

**Article 5 – Composition of Group Executive**

There will be a group executive that is responsible for governance and management of the group. Only members who are current MacEwan University students are eligible to be on the group executive.

The group will have an executive consisting of [select appropriate number]executive officers, namely:

**President:**

**Vice-President:**

**Secretary:**

**Treasurer:**

*(If there are additional executive officer roles list them here. Use the names appropriate for the group’s actual executive officers; for example, if there is a VP Finance that fulfills the role of the Treasurer, use the VP Finance title here, not Treasurer.)*

The duties and responsibilities of the President will include:

[list the president’s duties and responsibilities].

The duties and responsibilities of the Vice-President will include:

[list the vice-president’s duties and responsibilities].

The duties and responsibilities of the Secretary will include:

[list the secretary’s duties and responsibilities].

The duties and responsibilities of the Treasurer will include:

[list the treasurer’s duties and responsibilities].

*(Identify the duties and responsibilities for any other executive officers if your group has more.)*

Additional duties and responsibilities may be assigned or undertaken as they arise.

**Article 6 – Election of Executive Officers**

Election of the executive officers will occur at the [fall /OR/ winter *(select one or specify a month)*]general meeting.

Only members who are current MacEwan University students are eligible to vote for executive officers. Voting will be done by secret ballot.

Nomination of candidates for the group executive will be [advance nomination /OR/ by nomination at the meeting when the election is scheduled (*select one)*]*.* There will be a notice provided to members that nominations are open no less than two weeks before the election is scheduled to occur.

If there is only one nominee for a particular executive officer position, that individual will be [acclaimed /OR/ elected if successful in a yes-no vote *(select one)*].

The term for executive officers to hold their positions are from [start date *(identify month and day)*] following their election until [end date *(identify month and day)*] of the next calendar year or until an effective date of removal or resignation.

When a vacancy occurs, the membership will be notified of the vacancy. Election of a nominated individual to a vacant group executive officer position will be done by a vote of appointment by the current group executive.

**Article 7 – Removal of Executive Officers**

An executive officer may be automatically removed by the Groups Manager due to behavior that is inconsistent with the code of conduct, failure to uphold requirements of the position, behavior inconsistent with SAMU and MacEwan University regulations, or acting against the group’s Constitution, mandate, or interests.

Group members or executive officers may petition the Groups Manager for the removal of an executive officer for not fulfilling duties and responsibilities or for failing to act for the best interest of the group or for acting against the group’s Constitution and mandate.

**--- optional sections ---**

**Article 8 – Official Delegate**

Candidates for official delegate will be solicited when required. *(Identify this process.)*

**Article 9 – Group Advisor**

The group advisor helps promote the club to the department(s) with which the group works and offers the group guidance and support. The group advisor will not be a voting member of the group and will hold no approval authority for the group with respect to its internal affairs or activities. A group advisor may be sought for each department with which the group works most.

**Article 10 – Affiliation**

The group will be affiliated with [name of affiliated organization]*.* The group will adhere to the expectations of SAMU policies and procedures and of [name of affiliated organization] resulting from the affiliation.

**Article 11 – Finances**

Finances will be held and processed through SAMU’s group account system. All executive officers will be designated signing authorities. *(If the group has a fee, identify the amount, who pays it, and when it is paid. Remember that fees need to be approved by the Student Groups Department.)*

**Article 12 – Amendment**

The group executive will review any proposed amendments to the Constitution. If the group executive endorses the amendment, it will be voted on at a general meeting of the group. A two-thirds majorityvote in favor at the general meeting is required for amendments to the Constitution.

Within ten business days of being passed by members, the amended Constitution must be provided to the Student Groups Department for final approval. Amendments have no effect until final approval by the Student Groups Department is received.

**Article 13 – Closure**

The groups may be seeking closure by a recommendation of the group executive to the Student Groups Department or by a two-thirds majority vote in favor of closure at a general meeting of Group members. The Student Groups Department may also recommend closure.

The group executive is responsible for closing all accounts and securely deleting all membership information. All money and property will return to SAMU. The final group executive may indicate a requested donation recipient for funds remaining in the group’s account balance at the time of closure.

**Date originally adopted by the membership:** day-month-year

**Date last amended:** day-month-year

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| President Signature: |  |
| Date: |  |
| Secretary Signature: |  |
| Date: |  |

**Approved by Student Groups Department:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Definitions**

**Acclamation**: the automatic election of an individual to a position when there are no other candidates for that position.

**Adopt**: to approve a document as-is when presented to the group.

**Advisor**: a faculty member who serves as a mentor/liaison for a group.

**Affiliation**: the formal tie between a group and another organization.

**Agenda**: the document that contains meeting details and the items to be discussed and decided at the meeting.

**Amendment**: the change to a document that is proposed and voted on.

**Amendment Proposal**: the identification of the changes for a document and the rationale for the changes.

**Consensus:** decisions made by compromise and cooperation to find a common ground solution that can be accepted by all parties.

**Constitution**: the framework document that establishes a group’s structure and expectations.

**Decision-Making Model**: the process selected by a group for how that group will make decisions.

**Delegate**: the person selected to represent the group at conferences or other organization's meetings.

**General Meeting**: the meeting of the group when formal business items are decided if there are any, such as the election of executives.

**Nomination**: the naming of an individual as a candidate for election to a position. **Notice**: the written identification of the meeting details and agenda provided to group members.
**Petition:** a written request made for a specific action to be taken.

**Quorum**: the minimum number of members that must be present and able to vote before a vote can be taken.

**Recurrent**: a repeating event or requirement.

**Simple Majority**: decisions made by a direct vote with 50%+1 voting in favour.

**Solicit**: to seek an individual for a specific purpose, action, or role.

**Term**: the time an executive holds a position and has authority to act for the group according to the group’s Constitution.

**Unanimity**: a condition of consensus that requires that no party is opposed to a voting item.

**Vacancy**: an unfilled executive position when an executive resigns, is removed, or no one is elected.