**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 should contain the following elements:**

* Identification (name; acronym, if any; mandate)
* 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)
* Finances (membership fees, if any; signing authorities; budget/expense requirements)
* Group Advisor / Delegates (roles, selection)
* Affiliations (eg. MacEwan chapter of other organizations)
* Amendment
* Closure
* Fact Sheet (dates of approval, authorized signatures)

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 structure and operation of the Group. We can help you find something that works for your Group.

**Name**
Identify the official name of the Group, as well as the preferred acronym if there is one.

 Names are subject to requirements set by SAMU procedure. Changes must be provided to the Student Groups Manager for approval.

**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.

**Membership**
Membership categories can include current MacEwan students, alumni, students at other institutions, community partners, advisory members, professional resources, affiliates, and associate members. If using any of these categories, they should be defined in the constitution as well.

Membership in groups is open to all students. If there are other options and categories for membership, they are to be identified in this section. 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.

**Meetings**
General meetings are different than a group regular meeting that typically are the main social/activity/planning gatherings of the group throughout the year.

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

**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.

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.

**Voting Thresholds**
The group can also determine what form of decision-making best suits the group and their members’ preferences. These can include simple majority and consensus most commonly. 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.

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

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 in 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 Vice-President Secretary Treasurer**

**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**

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

**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.

**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.

**Official Delegate / 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.

**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.

**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 in order to wrap up the Group’s last items of business.

**Fact Sheet**
The fact sheet helps track the approval process of the constitution and any amendments. It also helps with record keeping so that there is never any question about which version of the constitution is the one in effect.

**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.