



# RECOGNIZED STUDENT ORGANIZATION CONSTITUTION

## What Is a Constitution?

A constitution is the governing document of a student organization that is intended to provide a system that ensures fairness and information to its membership. When developing your organization's constitution, it is important to remember to draft the document in a clear and concise manner, yet provide the important framework for your organization's success. A constitution should be at least two pages in length, leaving the detailed procedures of your organization's operations to the by-laws.

As you begin to develop your organization's constitution, we strongly recommend you to meet with one of our staff members to discuss the specific items your organization would like to include in your constitution. Reviewing these details prior to the formalization of your constitution may save a great deal of time and effort in getting your organization recognized by the MSSA. In a broader sense, a good constitution will guide the smooth operation of your organization for years to come.

If you would be interested in reviewing constitutions that have been developed by other RSO's, please visit SLD&SL (CSU 173) or the MSSA (CSU 280).

## A Model Constitution:

The following model constitution is intended to serve as a guide in drafting or revising your organization's constitution. If you have any questions while developing it, please contact SLD&SL, and we will be more than happy to assist you in any way possible.

## CONSTITUTION OF (NAME OF ORGANIZATION)

### ARTICLE I.

#### NAME

Section 1. The name of this organization shall be (name of organization).

Section 2. The organization is affiliated with (insert national/international affiliation, if applicable).

- a. If your organization does not have a national/international affiliation, Article I will be composed of only one section.
- b. In this case, it is not necessary to indicate "Section I." Just list the name of the organization without indicating a section number.

### ARTICLE II.

#### OBJECT OR PURPOSE

The purpose of this organization shall be to (Statement of Purpose).

- a. This article should highlight the general emphasis of your organization.



### ARTICLE III. MEMBERSHIP

- Section 1. Membership in this organization is open to (insert qualifications).
- Section 2. State how membership will be established:
- Election of current members
  - Invitation
  - Selection
  - Other method
- Section 3. State what type of vote is required if membership is extended by voting:
- Majority of members
  - Unanimous decision
  - Two-thirds vote
  - Example: Candidates for membership must be approved by a majority of the current membership.*
- Section 4. When membership dues are required, state that dues will be collected and when they will be collected.
- Remember that dues collection could impact your organization's eligibility to receive funding.
- Section 5. If honorary membership is permitted, indicate how membership is bestowed and if there are any limits on honorary membership.
- Example: Honorary membership may be conferred upon any Faculty member by a unanimous vote of those present at a regular meeting.*

NOTE:

Two-thirds of the voting membership must be current MSU students.

The Minnesota State Student Association accepts responsibility for ensuring equal opportunity in all aspects of its programs for all qualified persons regardless of race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, physical disability, reliance on public assistance, sex, marital status, or any other class or group distinction as set forth by state or federal anti-discrimination laws. All activity fees-funded and Minnesota State Student Association recognized student organizations shall accept responsibility for ensuring equal opportunity in all aspects of their programs.

*~ MSU Student Organization Handbook (Fall, 2004)*



## ARTICLE IV. OFFICERS

- Section 1. Designate the organization's officers.
- a. *Example: The officers of this organization shall be President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.*
- Section 2. State the duties of each officer.
- a. These should be the general duties of each officer.
- Section 3. Define the date of election and the length of the term of office.
- a. *Example: All officers shall be elected by secret ballot at the last meeting in November and shall continue in office for one calendar year.*
- Section 4. State the method of election.
- a. If candidates are to fill out an application or be nominated one week prior to election, the procedure should be explained in this section.
- Section 5. Voting.
- a. It should be clearly state here what type of vote it would take for a member to be elected to an office.
  - b. *Example: A candidate must receive a majority of votes of those present-and-voting to be elected to office.*
- Section 6. State how office vacancies may be filled.
- a. Two options are 1) to have vacancies filled by special election or 2) by the Executive Board or special committee.
  - b. *Example: If a vacancy occurs, it shall be filled at a special meeting called for the purpose of electing the officer. Member shall be given at least forty-eight hours notice of this special meeting.*
- Section 7. Officer Eligibility.
- a. Officers must be in good academic and disciplinary standing at the time of their election and remain in good standing during their tenure in office.
  - b. A higher GPA requirement (if applicable to your organization) should be included in this section.
- Section 8. Removal from Office.
- a. *Example: Any officer who has failed to fulfill their responsibilities may be removed by a two thirds vote of the entire membership during a special meeting held for this purpose. A petition for the removal of an officer must be submitted to the entire membership at least one week prior to the special meeting and all parties concerned shall have the opportunity to present their case. Proceedings in such cases shall be confidential. A vacant office shall be filled according to Section 7.*

**NOTE:**

It is imperative that all Recognized Student Organizations retain MSU students in chief decision making roles. To be eligible to be elected as an officer of a Recognized Student Organization, a person must be enrolled in at least one credit hour at MSU each semester during the regular academic year.

Two-thirds of the voting membership must be current MSU students.

~ MSU Student Organization Handbook (Fall, 2004)



**ARTICLE V.  
MEETINGS**

- Section 1. State how often meetings shall be held.
- a. Monthly
  - b. Bi-weekly
  - c. Weekly
  - d. Leave place and time of meetings to the by-laws.
- Section 2. State the provisions for special meetings.
- a. *Example: Special meetings may be called by the President or any three members provided that all members have been notified at least twenty-four*
- Section 3. State the percentage of voting members needed for a quorum.
- a. *Example: Fifty-one percent or more of the voting membership is necessary to constitute a quorum.*

**ARTICLE VI. (if necessary)  
EXECUTIVE BOARD**

- Section 1. State which officers shall comprise the Executive Board.
- a. *Example: The following officers shall compose the organization's Executive Board: President, Vice President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, and Treasurer.*
- Section 2. State the functions and duties of the Executive Board.
- a. These functions and duties should be of a general nature.
- Section 3. State how often meetings shall be held.
- a. See Article V, section 1.

**ARTICLE VII. (if necessary)  
COMMITTEES**

- Section 1. State the names of the various standing committees.
- Section 2. State the duties of the various standing committees.
- Section 3. State the means of obtaining special committees.
- a. *Example: Special Committees can be established by appointment or by a majority vote of the membership.*

**ARTICLE VIII.  
PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY**

- State which type/style of parliamentary authority will be used during meetings and where the type/style can be found.
- a. *Example: Meetings will be run by parliamentary authority as defined in Robert's Rules of Order, Revised.*



**ARTICLE IX.  
FINANCES**

- Section 1. State the source of funds.
- a. Dues
    - i. *Do not specify the amount of dues or other funds. Leave this for the by-laws.*
    - ii. *Remember that dues collection could impact your organizations eligibility to receive funding.*
  - b. Special assessments
  - c. Contributions

- Section 2. State the method of the expenditure of funds.
- a. All funds are to be deposited with and expended through the MSU Business Office or by an authorized checking account at a local bank.
  - b. *Example: Funds shall be expended upon the authorization of the organization by a majority vote of those present or in case of an emergency, expenditure upon the authorization of the Executive Board and the approval of the Advisor.*
  - c. It is strongly recommended that all checking accounts at local banks be required to have two signatures for expenditures. These signatures should come from the President, Treasurer, and/or Advisor.
  - d. If an organization has an income of more than \$500.00 per year, it must have an account with the MSU Business Office (SLD&SL can assist organizations with the necessary paperwork to establish an account with the MSU Business Office.)

- Section 3. State provisions for an audit of funds.
- a. *Example: An audit may be conducted at any time in compliance with current University policy. A special audit can be undertaken upon a vote of the majority of the members present at any regular meeting or at the discretion of the Executive Board and/or Advisor.*

**ARTICLE X.  
READING OF THE CONSTITUTION**

- Section 1. State provisions for the reading of the constitution (and by-laws).
- a. *Example: The constitution (and by-laws) shall be read/distributed to all members at the first meeting of each year.*
- Section 2. Make provisions for the distribution of copies of the constitution (and by-laws).
- a. *Example: Each new member shall receive a copy of the constitution (and by-laws) at the time they are accepted for membership.*

**ARTICLE XI.  
ADVISORS**

- Section 1. State provision for the selection of advisors.
- a. *Example: Two Advisors shall be selected by the organization.*
  - b. These Advisors must be approved by SLD&SL.
  - c. At least one Advisor must be a University Faculty/Staff member.
- Section 2. List the Advisor's duties.
- a. These duties should be of a general nature.



## **ARTICLE XII.**

### **METHOD OF AMENDMENT**

Make provisions for amending the constitution.

- a. *Example: This constitution may be amended at a regular meeting by a two-thirds vote of all members. The proposed amendment(s) shall be submitted in writing to all members of the organization at least seven days before being voted upon.*
- b. It is suggested that no constitution (or by-laws) should ever be amended by less than a two-thirds vote.

## **WHAT ARE BY-LAWS?**

By-Laws are the daily operation procedures of an organization. They contain the detailed processes by which an organization conducts business in an orderly manner. By-Laws also provide further detailed definition of articles of the constitution.

By-Laws are usually easier to modify, requiring only a simple majority rather than the two-thirds majority required to modify a constitution.

Below you will find an outline of the type of information that is normally covered in an organization's by-laws. Your organization is not required to submit by-laws with its constitution in order to be recognized by the MSSA, but it recommended that your organization establish them as soon as possible.

- I. **Membership** - selection requirements, resignations, expulsions, rights, and obligations
- II. **Dues** - amount and collection procedure, special fees, when payable
- III. **Executive Board** - structure, members, powers, duties
- IV. **Duties of Officers** - specific job descriptions, responsibilities
- V. **Committees** - standing, special, how formed, chairpersons, meetings, powers, duties
- VI. **Duties of Advisor** - powers, responsibilities, specific job description
- VII. **Elections** - time of year, winning vote margin, eligibility to vote and run for office, procedures for filling vacant positions

### **This Model Constitution was adopted from:**

The University of Kansas, Leader Bits: Tips on Leadership Development Series, 1992  
Western Illinois University, Model Constitution, 1992