



UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER
STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
GOVERNMENT

Task Force to Examine Student Organizations Report and Recommendations

September 2018 - April 2019

The Task Force to Examine Student Organizations,
Students' Association Government

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INTRODUCTION:

CONTRIBUTORS:

This project was generated by the Task Force to Examine Student Organization (the “Task Force”). Membership of the Task Force is as follows:

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BACKGROUND & MISSION:

In recent years, there has been a large influx of established student organizations on the University of Rochester River Campus, bringing the total number of student organizations to over 200 in 2018. It was determined that the current systems used to govern student organizations was restricting their growth and operation, and as a result the Task Force to Examine Student Organizations was established through a Students' Association Bill and Proposal in Spring of 2018. The primary mission of the Task Force was to address the question of, “What is a student organization?” in addition to addressing the following areas:

- Review the rights and privileges of being a Students' Association (SA) recognized student organization. Over the years, these rights and privileges have become unclear with a growing population of student organizations and changes to the internal structure of the SA Government, and thus must be redefined.

- Evaluate the current classification system of student organizations. Does the current classification system provide the most benefit and the best base for the evaluation and funding of student organizations?
- Address issues with fairness and equity relating to the guidelines that govern student organizations. Broad rules and guidelines provide difficulties when smaller, less active organizations are evaluated on the same metric as ones that are larger and operate like a business.
- Evaluate the structure in place which allows committees to be formed and clarify the rights and privileges of a committee. How should possible new committees be evaluated, should committees be allowed to be formed, and how does the presence of committees within an organization affect their funding?
- Examine the relationship between the SA/WCSA and other University departments in regards to the policies concerning student organizations that are supported by both.
- Review the possibility of associate memberships for graduate students, faculty, and staff. Should these populations have access to the resources of the SA when they do not contribute in the same way that undergraduates do?

The Task Force was charged with compiling a list of Recommendations to be implemented by a subsequent body. This report includes all of the Recommendations discussed and supported by the data collected by the Task Force.

SURVEYING OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY:

OVERVIEW:

It was established in the Proposal to Establish a Task Force to Examine Student Organizations that the student body should be intimately involved with the development of the Recommendations. As a result, we had multiple members of the student body on the Task Force at all times, and we had many different avenues through which students could voice their opinions and issues with the current student organization structure for governance. Benchmarking was done on the organizational styles of 12 other schools to better inform the Task Force members about possible systems that could be implemented on our own campus. Information was provided to members about the current procedures of the Administration & Review Committee (ARC) and the Students' Association Appropriations Committee (SAAC), in addition to auxiliary information about the current student groups on campus. ARC and SAAC also gave presentations about issues their members thought were relevant, including a detailed presentation about the Student Organization Annual Review (SOAR). In person meetings were held by the Committee with leaders of committees, parent organizations, and advisors who work with committees to better understand the structure, benefits, and restrictions of the current committee system. The Director of Student Activities also attended meetings to share their insight about the current committee and classification systems. In addition to the required Town Hall held each semester, we also held two Feedback Sessions in the Spring semester and collected data from the Student Organization Annual Review about the operations of student organization. There was a form open on the Campus Community Connection (CCC) site for the entire period which students could use to express their opinions on the issues the Task Force was investigating. This data was used to determine the priorities and needs of the student leaders on our campus, and to inform the Recommendations of the Task Force.

METHODS:

Town Halls were held each semester, one in the Fall to gather information about the student organization experience in the College, and another in the Spring to gauge reactions to proposed Recommendations. These Town Halls were open to the public and all students were free to attend and voice their opinions.

In addition, two Feedback Sessions were held in the Spring Semester, where students answered a series of questions, including what resources their organization uses and how they are impacted by the current regulations. Students were compensated with food, and the chance to win an Amazon gift card.

SURVEYS CONDUCTED:

A survey was attached to the SOAR Self Report, in which student leaders could comment on their interactions with Wilson Commons Student Activities (WCSA), the Administration & Review

Committee, the Students' Association Appropriations Committee, and with the resources available to them. The Task Force also collected student opinions via a form open on the University's CCC site. This information, in conjunction with the information gathered from the Town Halls and Feedback Session, was used to finalize the recommendations of the Task Force.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE TASK FORCE:

INTRODUCTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

All Recommendations were voted on by the Task Force in April, and all passed unanimously except for Recommendations #8 and #9, which still passed by a majority vote. While in the initial documents that created the Task Force it stated that the co-chairs had voting powers in the Task Force, neither co-chair participated in the voting on the recommendations.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. *It is recommended that a naming convention for student organizations be adopted. Organizations would not put UR or University of Rochester in their official name. If they are recognized, it is one of the rights of a student organization to use UR or University of Rochester as part of their name. Rochester would not be an acceptable substitute since it then could refer to the city of Rochester or another Rochester area college.*

This recommendation is based off of benchmarking from other schools and the desire to clean up some of the associated student organization systems to make sorting and organizing organizations easier. This would also allow an organization who initially might not have had UR or University of Rochester in their name to use these labels without requesting a constitution change. This would be especially beneficial to organizations who participate in off-campus competitions. A mass constitution change, or legislation through the Senate, could be avenues explored to modify affected organizations' names.

2. *It is recommended that a student organization handbook be created and distributed.*

Through feedback from SOAR, it was noted that many student leaders identified challenges with having all of the information they need to be successful in one easy location. Many other schools have similar tools and the Task Force believes this would help organizations specifically in their event planning and officer transition. This handbook could be available online or in printed format to meet a variety of learning styles. While not an exhaustive list, potential topics to include in the manual could be: organization registration, event registration, catering information, funding rules, publicity opportunities, leadership development, officer transition, working with advisors, the 10 Principles, and reservation information.

3. *It is recommended that student government strengthen the connection between student government and student organizations.*

Through the SOAR feedback, student leaders identified a desire to have a closer relationship with student government. Some of the suggestions included: featuring new organizations when formed,

highlighting a student organization or their events each month, and regular communication between elected leaders and the leaders of student organizations.

4. *Student organization Executive Board elections must be held 2 weeks before the last day of classes each semester.*

One of the areas identified where student organizations can have challenges is during officer transitions. The Task Force would like to make sure officers are elected in a timely manner so that they receive information and attend the next leadership training (which includes business manager training). These are held at the beginning of each semester. The dates of these should be announced earlier so that potential new leaders can make appropriate travel plans.

5. *It is recommended that student organizations be educated regarding what resources their student activities fee supports and what resources are funded through other sources.*

One of the questions posed to the Task Force was to identify what was a SA resource. The Task Force did not have time to fully explore this topic. The concept of a SA resource is hard to define as many resources offered to student organizations are not funded through the student activities fee. We do believe students should understand what resources are provided through the student activities fee through SA Government and which resources are funded in other ways.

6. *It is recommended that the current classification system be restructured.*
 - a. *It is recommended that the categorization of an organization moves towards a system that is based on the activity level of an organization.*
 - b. *We recommend that the umbrella of cultural organizations be examined to eventually dissolve that classification to one or more specific classifications that might better reflect their activities.*
 - c. *Religious and spiritual life replaces religious category.*
 - d. *Community engagement replaces community service category.*

There should be distinctions made between the three overarching types of organizations: Residential Life, Fraternities & Sororities, and Wilson Commons Student Activities (which would include RCCL and Interfaith Chapel) organizations. This recommendation is based on some of the current issues including:

- While the current classification system can be helpful for establishing funding guidelines and assigning an advisor, it is challenging because not all organizations within a category are similar especially in terms of resource allocation and evaluation.
- There is confusion on whether the classifications or categories determine resources or whether they are a public identifier.

- Within categories, not all organizations do the same level of programming nor use the same resources.
- Some organizations have access to substantial resources beyond the student activities fee funding and some do not.
- There are some entities on campus that are not listed anywhere, which are not student organizations but would be helpful to have on CCC, potentially creating a category of Advisory Boards.
- There is confusion whether student organizations can exist if they are not listed on CCC.

7. *It is recommended that a small implementation team of students and staff be determined before the end of the academic year to work on implementing the recommendations. The work would begin in the summer so that some recommendations could be implemented for the fall and the remainder of the recommendations would begin implementation by December 2019.*

The Task Force was charged with proposing recommendations in several areas regarding the management of student organizations. Based on these recommendations, there will need to be a small team of students and staff to implement these changes. The goal would be to have some of the recommendations that would be good to have in place by the beginning of the academic year be implemented over the summer with then a full implementation plan completed by December 2019 in preparation for the spring 2020 SOAR and budget process, even though some changes would not be implemented until the fall of 2020.

NEW ORGANIZATION CRITERIA:

1. *It is recommended that a tiered system based on the activity level of organizations is considered. If an organization is more active, they will have higher expectations and more access to resources.*
 - a. *The minimum number of members for student organizations is 6 undergraduate members. Organizations with only 6 members will receive limited funding and resources.*
 - b. *The minimum number of members for a student organization to receive an itemized budget and additional resources is 12 undergraduate members.*
 - c. *Depending on the organization that is proposed, the minimum members may be raised. This will address club sports and competing performance groups.*

Throughout the Task Force conversations and information review, one of the topics that resonated the most was the idea that different organizations need different membership numbers, resources, and requirements. A tiered system would allow for smaller organizations to form as the current minimum number of members is 12. It would also allow for resources to be allocated based on the activities an

organization would like to hold. The Task Force sees a differences between organizations that are discussion based, organizations who might have close ties with an academic department, and organizations who reserve large programming spaces (such as Strong Auditorium, Feldman Ballroom, May Room, etc.) and believe the membership requirements, access to resources, and evaluation practices should be different.

2. *In light of new processes surrounding the creation of student organizations, the 10 Principles should be re-evaluated before being used as the primary criteria for the creation of organizations.*

The Task Force did not have time to fully analyze the 10 Principles. Since one of the recommendations changes the way we think about resources and membership (which are two of the current principles), the Task Force believes that the 10 Principles should be fully reviewed to reflect these recommendations, especially since the principles are also used to evaluate organizations. It has also been several years since there has been a full review of the 10 Principles.

3. *Preliminary status for new organizations will be eliminated.*

One of the challenges with preliminary statues is that all organizations must come to two hearings in order to complete the process. Throughout the feedback that was reviewed, one of the common threads was decreasing the amount of administrative hurdles for organizations. Only having to attend one hearing would eliminate a hurdle. In addition, there are already mechanisms in place to handle organizations who are non-responsive. Each fall, all organizations are required to complete a registration process and if they do not register, processes are already put in place to derecognize the organization at that stage. There is also the SOAR process which is another way to evaluate the progress of new organizations.

4. *New organization proposals should only be accepted through December 1st each academic year.*

This recommendation supports a practice that has been done for the past two years. ARC has seen organizations who are formed during the second semester struggle to be successful because they missed the winter activities fair and the mid-year leadership training. Organizations have also struggled with planning their first events and meetings near the end of semester when students are often not looking for a new organization, but are either planning or attending end of year events by other student organizations.

5. *All non returning students (e.g. graduating seniors, exchange students) cannot submit a new organization proposal. The list of potential members on the proposal has to be more than half returning students.*

The Task Force believes that there should be systems in place to make sure that organizations are sustainable. With the recommended reduction in the number of members needed to form an

organization, the Task Force wants to ensure that a group of graduating seniors cannot form an organization that would only last for a year.

6. *All first semester students on campus cannot propose an organization. There will be an information session at the end of the spring semester on how to start a new organization rather than having a submission time for new organizations each semester.*

This recommendation is based on the idea that during students first semester on campus, they should explore all of the current organizations that exist before starting a new organization. This would be another control in place to make sure that organizations are sustainable.

7. *It is recommended that a simplified constitution process is established. There should be a general document with the name of the organization, the resources they need, and their mission. Any rules regarding how the organization is maintained will be included in an appendix.*

To increase the efficiency of the new organization process, there should be a simplified constitution created. In addition, many organizations struggle to keep their constitutions up to date. With a cleaner and more simplified format, changes would either be easier or potentially not as necessary. The constitution would also include a resources contract or agreement so there is greater understanding of what an organization would like to accomplish. Right now there are many instances where a mission of an organization is hard to interpret because of the broad statements in their constitution. Changes to an Appendix would not have to be reviewed by ARC.

8. *Investigate the possible benefits of creating a combined committee that streamlines the current functions of ARC and SAAC. There should be a small group of current members of ARC, SAAC, Student government leadership and WCSA who would determine how this could be successful.*

Currently both of these committees need to work together in order to successfully support student organizations. Often the decisions made by each of these committees rely on information that the other committee has. For example, ARC is approving new organizations, but SAAC is making a decision about how these organizations are funded. To do this, both committees are being asked to interpret the missions of the organizations. In addition, ARC leads the SOAR process and then SAAC relies on the evaluations from SOAR to make funding decisions. There could be greater shared knowledge if these two committees were combined and would eliminate another administrative hurdle for student organizations.

The Task Force acknowledges that there would be a lot of logistics to work out in order to implement this recommendation and that is why the recommendation includes identifying a small working group specifically for this recommendation. This recommendation is also not meant to be implemented for

the fall of 2019 as that would not allow the time for the working group to make sure this new model is successful.

9. *It is recommended that there be a combined committee of students and staff to review new organization proposals, derecognizations, and significant mission or name changes.*

Currently, there is little staff input on the formation of new student organizations. Through benchmarking, it was learned that this is different from many other institutions. While the Task Force believes that peer to peer decisions are important, there is also an opportunity to include more input from the beginning of the process that would assist with making sure new organizations are successful. In addition, currently on campus, both for Residential Life and Fraternities & Sororities new organization formation, it is committees that are made up of both students and staff.

10. *If a student feels the process for a new organization or funding of an organization was not properly done, and avenues through SAAC and ARC or a suitable replacement have been exhausted, organizations may appeal through ACJC.*

All decisions should be able to be appealed and the Task Force believes that for matters associated with student organizations, the avenue should be ACJC.

COMMITTEES:

1. *It is recommended that the current committee structure be ended. Current committees have the option to become their own organization or to become an initiative of the parent organization. It is encouraged that the idea of initiatives of student organizations be used in the future. Initiatives of a student organization would not receive their own CCC page nor budget, but could be labeled to identify themselves.*
2. *If there is an initiative under an organization the organization must create a chair for the initiative on their eboard that manages the event or initiative.*
3. *The Task Force recognizes the connections and community that exist between some of the parent organizations and committees, especially for the cultural organizations. It is recommended that if that is the case, these organizations create executive board or liaison positions in order to maintain these connections.*

The current committee structure has evolved from its original intention. Committees were initially created so that initiatives or activities that might not have the membership numbers needed to be their

own organization could still have a presence on campus. Committees were not supposed to have their own executive boards, only a committee chair, nor a separate constitution from a parent organization. Many of the current committees are operating like student organizations, but are not receiving the same support or resources. By recommending a reduction in the number of members needed for an organization, the Task Force believes there are opportunities for all current committees to either be their own organization or to be an initiative under a student organization.

Some of the challenges with the current committee system that were identified are:

- Funding – Committees do not receive their own account nor their own budget. When committees fundraise, the money goes to the parent organization and not specifically the committee. When budgeting, the parent organization might not receive everything needed for the committees.
- Classification – A committee might be under a parent organization in one category, but their activities might be more aligned with organizations in another category (i.e. cultural organizations who have committees who perform)
- Officers, Constitutions, and Resources - Many current committees are functioning as small organizations which complicates funding, reservations, awards, and other opportunities that are reserved for organizations, not committees.

SOAR AND EVALUATION PERIOD:

1. *Evaluation process should be adjusted to be based on resources used and activity level of organizations.*
 - a. *All student organizations should not have the same requirements for executive board meetings, general member members, or programs.*
 - b. *Quality over quantity should be rewarded.*
 - c. *More rewards for those organizations who Exceed Expectations besides funding should be implemented.*

This recommendation is based on SOAR feedback and a survey conducted through the student government leadership course. Organizations that host multiple, large programs with hundreds of students expected to attend should be evaluated differently than those that only hold small, weekly meetings or activities.

2. *All organizations must complete the SOAR.*

There was general consensus that the current evaluation process could be improved. Right now all organizations are being treated very similarly when evaluated and there should be distinctions made based on the activities of the organization. Currently, organizations who are preliminary status are not evaluated through SOAR, but if preliminary status is eliminated, then all new organizations should go through this updated evaluation process.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIPS:

1. *It is recommended that the current policy of faculty, staff, and graduate students holding associate membership in student organizations (but not officer positions) be continued. Currently, alumni cannot hold associate membership in organizations and that this policy should also be continued. It is recognized that alumni can play a meaningful role in student organizations, but that it should not be an officer, member, or voting role. It is recommended that WCSA and student government continue to work with Alumni Relations to continue to develop the role that alumni can play (i.e. advisory boards, etc.).*

This recommendation affirms the current policies that are in place and does not recommend making any changes.

2. *The Task Force has had some conversations about Eastman undergraduate students and their role in student organizations. There are currently some Eastman students who hold officer positions in student organizations even though policy would indicate that they should only be able to hold Associate Membership. There are also a number of dual degree students and their role in organizations is unclear. There was not enough information or discussion to provide a recommendation, but the Task Force believe this should be a topic for future investigation as there was enough desire to rethink the current policy of only Associate Membership for Eastman students.*

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the Task Force urges that these Recommendations be accepted and implemented by the Students' Association Government for the betterment of all student organizations on campus. Currently, there exists a barrier between student government and the organizations that they represent and support. In accepting these Recommendations, the Students' Association Government will show that they are willing to listen to the needs of the students, and to work towards a more streamlined and effective way of managing the more than 200 organizations under their care. By making the processes by which students create, manage, and enjoy their student organizations less burdened by administrative mechanisms, the Students' Association Government will promote growth and expansion that will be sustainable for years to come.