

**RESOLUTION TO AMEND IN ITS ENTIRETY THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT ASSEMBLY AND REENACT AS “THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT SENATE”**

**WHEREAS**, in the Spring 2019, President Sands appointed the President’s Committee on Governance (PCG) charged with conducting the first comprehensive review of the university’s governance system in more than 25 years. The recommendations from the first phase of the PCG’s work proposed formalizing the role of faculty, staff, and the student representative bodies within the governance system and redefining the relationship between those bodies and University Council and the commissions. A joint resolution proposing the framework for the overall governance system is being advanced by the Commission on Faculty Affairs, the Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs, the Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs, and the Commission on Student Affairs to University Council for approval; and

**WHEREAS**, in the summer of 2020 the President and Provost approved the creation of a Task Force on the Future of Student Governance to work in parallel with the PCG with the specific goal of developing a set of recommendations for redesigning the structure of student governance to more effectively the voice of the undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; and

**WHEREAS**, the Task Force, co-chaired by the Vice-President for Student Affairs and the Vice President for Policy and Governance and composed of current and former undergraduate and graduate student leaders along with a representative from PCG and officials from Student Affairs and the Graduate School, studied the existing undergraduate and graduate/professional representative bodies, assessed their strengths and deficiencies, and consulted with the American Student Government Association; and

**WHEREAS**, the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) and its President (a member of both PCG and the Task Force on the Future of Student Governance) charged the Judicial and Internal Affairs Committee (JIAC) of the GSA with identifying and recommending solutions to structural and operational issues within the GSA Constitution, with the goal of increasing effective advocacy and engagement across the graduate and professional student community; and

**WHEREAS**, such recommendations could extend to and include amendments to, or a complete revision of, the GSA Constitution; and

**WHEREAS**, after an extensive analysis, the JIAC found foundational flaws with the GSA Constitution and GSA operations, including (1) the GSA Constitution is overly verbose and self-contradictory, not accessible and does not reflect how GSA actually operates; (2) the GSA Constitution contained too much information, especially procedural information that does not belong in a structural document; (3) workloads of some Executive board members are too high and imbalanced; (4) no formal link from GSA to Graduate Student Organizations at Extended Campuses exists; (5) no established process to bring up issues to be addressed exists; (6) there is little policy and operational continuity year-to-year within the GSA; and (7) there is no formal mechanism for cultivating effective student advocacy through the GSA from the departmental or program level; and

**WHEREAS**, the JIAC found resolution of these issues to be so adverse to the stated goals of increasing effective advocacy and engagement across the graduate and professional student community and so unresolvable within the current form of GSA Constitution that a complete rewrite was necessary; and

**WHEREAS**, the JIAC met extensively over the course of seven months, conducted surveys, engaged stakeholders, presented to multiple governance bodies for feedback, and carefully crafted a revised structure and language that supports the goals stated above; and

**WHEREAS**, the revised structure and language is memorialized in the new Constitution of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Graduate Student Assembly hereby amends in its entirety the Constitution of the Graduate Student Assembly and reenacts it as “the Constitution of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate” to take effect immediately upon approval by all necessary university governance bodies; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the GSA hereby communicates the actions of this resolution to the Board of Visitors of Virginia Tech and President of the University, through all other necessary university governance bodies, and requests concurrence therein.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

That the above resolution amending the Constitution of the Graduate Student Assembly and reenact it as the Constitution of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate be approved.

June 7, 2021

# Virginia Tech Graduate and Professional Student Senate Constitution

## Article I: Name, Purpose, and Organization

### Section 1: Name

The name of this organization is the Graduate and Professional Student Senate (“GPSS”) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (“Virginia Tech”).

### Section 2: Purpose

The purpose of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate is to serve as a voice for all graduate students through advocacy and community-building in a culture of inclusivity and support; ensure access to the resources necessary for scholarly and professional success; and foster a network of coalitions among all graduate students to help us achieve these goals.

### Section 3: Organization

- A. The GPSS shall consist of a Senate comprised of Senators and an Executive Board elected by the Senate.
- B. All graduate, professional, and accelerated master’s students at Virginia Tech shall be entitled to the services and programs that the GPSS provides.
- C. GPSS governance shall be aided by three documents:
  - a. The Constitution of the GPSS shall define the functions, structures, and processes critical to the purpose of the organization.
  - b. The Bylaws shall codify specific structures and operations of the GPSS. Bylaws include the written recording of all procedures and operating guidelines not specified in this Constitution.
  - c. The GPSS Handbook shall memorialize current normative practices, recommendations, and guidance for members, senators, and the Executive Board.

## Article II: Senate

### Section 1: Purpose

The purpose of the GPSS Senate is to serve as a single body that represents all graduate and professional students, providing an equal voice for all entities represented. The Senate has the authority and responsibility to consider all issues that concern graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech and provide appropriate policy recommendations through legislative action.

## Section 2: Membership

- A. All current graduate, professional, and accelerated master's students at Virginia Tech shall be eligible to serve in the Senate.
- B. No student shall be eligible to serve as a voting member of the GPSS if they currently serve as a voting member of any other Senates within the University Governance system.
- C. Each academic entity at Virginia Tech with graduate or professional students should have a local-level student organization equivalent to the GPSS. For the purpose of this Constitution, "academic entity" includes, but is not limited to, any academic department, school subunit, interdisciplinary program, graduate program administered by a supra-Departmental entity, or any other such academic entity recognized by the administrative offices of Virginia Tech ("the University"). The full list of such entities will be enumerated in the Bylaws.
- D. The Senate shall be comprised of Senators who may be appointed by the entities in Article II, Section 2(C).
- E. Each aforementioned entity may elect no more than two senators.
- F. The process for selecting Senators shall be at the sole discretion of the entities in Article II, Section 2(C).
- G. To be officially recognized, Senators shall register with the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs through a process the Vice President will administrate. Upon Recognition, the Senate Seat is officially held and no longer open until the end of the current Senate term or they otherwise resign.
- H. The Senate may appoint additional graduate, professional, and accelerated masters students to the Senate. Policies and processes for such appointments shall be defined in the Bylaws.

## Section 3: Term

- A. The term of the Senate body shall begin on the first day of class in the academic year and end on the day preceding the first day of class in the following academic year.
- B. At the beginning of each term the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs will administrate the process of officially recognizing Senators from each academic entity to fill the Senate seats for the current term.
- C. Senators may serve unlimited terms for as long as they are eligible.
- D. Any academic entity may replace their representative, or fill a vacant seat at any time.
- E. If a Senator is elected to an Executive Board office, the Senate seat becomes vacant when the Senator assumes the Executive Board office. An academic entity may appoint a new Senator to fill the vacant seat.

## Section 4: Roles and Responsibilities

Senators shall:

- A. Attend Senate meetings;
- B. Serve in at least one of the Senate Committees detailed in Article III or in some other capacity benefitting the GPSS as a whole.

- C. Inform constituents of GPSS proceedings, including and not limited to legislation and programs;
- D. Be available to constituents and communicate their concerns and issues to the Senate; and
- E. Have full rights and privileges of speaking, voting, and proposing motions and legislation at all Senate meetings.

## **Section 5: Senate Meetings**

- A. The Senate shall meet, at a minimum, once per month during the academic year on a regular date and time scheduled by the President at the beginning of the academic year.
- B. The President, a majority of the Executive Board, or one fifth of Senators may call a special meeting, provided that the GPSS is given a minimum of 72 hours notice of any special meeting.
- C. All current graduate and professional students shall have full rights and privileges of attending and speaking at all Senate meetings, but shall not vote or propose motions.
- D. A quorum of the Senate or one of its committees is defined as a simple majority of the total recognized voting members of the Senate. A quorum is required at all GPSS and committee meetings in order to conduct business.
- E. Senators unable to attend a meeting may designate an alternate who meets the eligibility requirements outlined in Article II, Section 2(A), to vote on any pending issue in their absence. The name of the alternate shall be submitted in writing to the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs prior to the vote.

# **Article III: Committees and Sub-divisions**

## **Section 1: Committees**

- A. To ensure effective and efficient execution of Senate activities and operations, committees of the Senate shall be created. Committees shall perform their functions and duties in accordance with this Constitution and the GPSS Bylaws.
- B. Voting Members of all committees shall be restricted to Senators. Any graduate, professional, or accelerated master's student at Virginia Tech may serve as a non-voting member of a committee.
- C. The Senate may create Standing Committees, Policy Committees, Operational Committees, and Special Committees.
  - a. Standing Committees
    - i. Standing Committees of the Senate shall be permanent Committees established by the GPSS Bylaws.
    - ii. A Standing Committees perform functions vital to Senate operations. Standing Committees shall deliberate and report their findings to the Senate regularly.
  - b. Policy Committees
    - i. Any member of the Executive Board may appoint policy committees to aid in their specific activities, tasks, or initiatives.

- ii. The Executive Board member appointing a policy committee shall have oversight over and responsibility for the policy committee.
  - c. Operational Committees
    - i. GPSS operational activity not done by the Executive Board or standing committees shall be done through the use of operational committees.
    - ii. The Chief of Staff shall have operational oversight over operational committees.
    - iii. Operational committees shall be established through the use of Bylaws.
    - iv. Operational committees have the authority to plan, organize, and implement events and projects, so long as these events and projects fall within the purview of that committee as specified in this Constitution or in Bylaws.
  - d. Special Committees
    - i. Special Committees of the Senate shall be created and dissolved by Acts of the Senate by a majority vote.
    - ii. A Special Committee shall deliberate and report on a specific matter deemed necessary by the Senate.
    - iii. The composition of a special committee shall be determined by the Senate.
- D. All Committees of the Senate shall be subordinated to the Senate itself. All outcomes of Committee deliberation shall be subjected to review, confirmation, referral, and rejection by the Senate.
- E. All committee work involving any event or project that has a financial cost, a major change to GPSS operation, or explicitly required to do so in this Constitution or a Bylaw shall draft and submit to the GPSS reports summarizing their activities. All other committees are encouraged, but not required, to draft and submit reports summarizing their activities.
- F. All deliberations of Committees shall be recorded in the minutes, which shall be made available to all GPSS Members and the public.
- G. All Committees of the Senate shall operate in accordance with procedures as specified by the GPSS Bylaws.

## **Section 2: Sub-divisions**

- A. For the purpose of collective advocacy, the Senate shall be subdivided by college, and in such a way so as to encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- B. The Senate, by majority vote, may create additional sub-divisions.
- C. Structures, policies, and processes for fulfilling the requirements of this Section shall be defined in the bylaws.

# Article IV: Executive Board

## Section 1: Purpose

The purpose of the Executive Board is to set strategic direction and provide efficient, effective execution of the policies set by the Senate. The Executive Board shall be the party primarily responsible for ensuring that GPSS's needs are met and is represented at the university level.

## Section 2: Membership

- A. The Executive Board shall consist of the
  - a. President,
  - b. Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs,
  - c. Secretary and Director of Communications,
  - d. Treasurer and Director of Finance,
  - e. Director of Events,
  - f. Director of Advocacy,
  - g. Director of Programs.
- B. The Executive Board shall also appoint a Chief of Staff to serve as a non-voting member of the Executive Board.
- C. All current graduate, professional, and accelerated master's students at Virginia Tech shall be eligible to serve on the Executive Board.

## Section 3: Roles and Responsibilities

- A. President
  - a. The President is charged with setting the direction of and leading the GPSS. While the President is ultimately accountable to the general GPSS body, a large amount of power and discretion is vested into this role to enable the aggressive pursuit of the goals of the GPSS.
  - b. The President shall be the representative voice of the GPSS. As the chief executive officer of the GPSS, the President communicates on the behalf of all GPSS Members to University administrators, faculty, staff, undergraduate students, the Blacksburg community, and other external bodies.
  - c. The President shall:
    - i. Represent the GPSS and graduate student interests at all official functions and meetings related to University Governance;
    - ii. Lead each Executive Board meeting and with its advice generate agendas for Senate meetings;
    - iii. Act as Chair of the Senate and conduct Senate Meetings as an impartial chairperson;
    - iv. Appoint a Parliamentarian to advise on proper procedure and rules for conducting meetings;
    - v. Execute all Resolutions adopted by the Senate;

- vi. Provide timely information to the Senate regarding matters of graduate student welfare and University policies; and
- vii. Chair the President's Cabinet.

B. Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs

- a. The Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs ("Vice President") shall be the chief advisor to the President and the Executive Board in matters of University governance.
- b. The Vice President is charged with assisting the President in their duties to whatever extent they are requested to do so and are able. When needed and with the President's consent, they are permitted to act with similar authority and power as the President.
- c. If the President for whatever reason vacates their seat, the Vice President shall assume all duties and responsibilities of the President until an election for a replacement can occur.
- d. The Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs shall:
  - i. Advise and assist the President, especially on matters of University policy;
  - ii. Recommend to the GPSS nominations for representatives of the GPSS to University Governance bodies, including the University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees;
  - iii. Coordinate the activities of the representatives to University governance bodies, collect all information about University governance activities from the representatives, and compile the relevant information into University Governance Reports to be presented at each Senate Meeting;
  - iv. Maintain the Senate roster; and
  - v. Record and encourage Senator participation.

C. Director of Communications and Secretary

- a. The Director of Communications and Secretary is charged with organizing documents to maintain institutional memory. The Secretary shall be given powers and responsibilities to ensure record keeping of sufficient quality is done to meet the needs of the GPSS.
- b. The Director of Communications and Secretary shall be responsible for all official communications originating from the GPSS, ensuring activities within the GPSS are communicated in an effective manner to all interested parties, and maintain an appropriate public relations campaign.
- c. The Director of Communications and Secretary shall:
  - i. Advise and assist the President and other Executive Board members on all matters related to the communications and public relations of the GPSS;
  - ii. Maintain the archive of all GPSS documents, including but not limited to Senate agendas and minutes, governing documents, and resolutions;
  - iii. Draft official communications of the GPSS;
  - iv. Take minutes of the Senate at each Senate Meeting; and

- v. Maintain an appropriate presence of the GPSS in the media, including, but not limited to, University Relations publications, the GPSS Website, and social media.

D. Treasurer and Director of Finance

- a. The Director of Finance and Treasurer is charged with managing the financial resources of the GPSS. The Director of Finance and Treasurer shall be given powers and responsibilities to ensure funds are received and distributed to meet the needs of the GPSS.
- b. The Director of Finance and Treasurer shall:
  - i. Chair the Graduate Student Budget Board;
  - ii. Advise and assist the Executive Board on all matters related to the finances of the GPSS;
  - iii. Maintain accounts and records of all GPSS financial transactions, deposits, and disbursements;
  - iv. Draft the annual budget for the GPSS to be approved by the Senate;
  - v. Report to the Senate at each meeting the financial situation of the GPSS, advising the Senate on all matters related to GPSS finance; and
  - vi. Explore and maintain external funding sources as appropriate in order for the GPSS to fulfill its purpose.

E. Director of Advocacy

- a. The Director of Advocacy is responsible for movement-building and coordination among the academic entities and student organizations represented in the GPSS.
- b. The Director of Advocacy shall:
  - i. Help graduate student sub-groups form, grow, and advocate within their departments, colleges, communities, and campuses; and
  - ii. Facilitate strategy-swapping for effective advocacy between graduate student groups.
  - iii. Collect and compile ideas, issues, and concerns of Senators to be addressed by the Senate body

F. Director of Programs

- a. The Director of Programs shall oversee all GPSS programs, defined as participation-based services and events that require long term planning and budgeting, and further detailed in the Bylaws.
- b. The Director of Programs shall:
  - i. Advise and assist the President and other members of the Executive Board on all matters related to GPSS programs and events;
  - ii. Report relevant program activities to the Senate at each Senate Meeting;
  - iii. Coordinate the efforts of the Chairpersons of any Programming Committee;
  - iv. Be ultimately responsible for the development and execution of all GPSS Programs; and

- v. Create and convene Executive Working Groups to review and discuss specific GPSS Programs and potential new programs that adhere to the purpose of the GPSS, and report findings to the Senate.

#### G. Director of Events

- a. The Director of Events shall oversee all GPSS Events. For purposes of this section, GPSS Events shall be defined as attendance-based events and services that further the GPSS Mission, including but not limited to social and intellectual development events organized by the GPSS.
- b. The Director of Events shall be ultimately responsible for the effective operation of all GPSS Events organized by the GPSS in pursuant to the purpose of the GPSS.
- c. The Director of Events shall:
  - i. Advise and assist the President and other members of the Executive Board on all matters related to GPSS Events;
  - ii. Report relevant activities to the Senate at each Senate Meeting;
  - iii. Coordinate the efforts of the Chairs of Event Committees;
  - iv. Be ultimately responsible for the execution and development of all GPSS Events

#### H. Chief of Staff

- a. The Chief of Staff, as Chief Operations Officer, is charged with ensuring effective internal operation of the GPSS. The Chief of Staff shall be given powers and responsibilities to ensure operational functions are fulfilled to the fullest potential possible.
- b. The Chief of Staff shall:
  - i. Have general oversight of all GPSS operations;
  - ii. Aid any established committees with completing their goals;
  - iii. Advise and assist the Executive Board on all matters related to GPSS operations; and
  - iv. Report relevant activities to the Senate at each Senate Meeting.

## **Section 4: Election of Executive Board Members**

- A. GPSS Elections will be conducted in accordance with the GPSS Constitution and Bylaws.
- B. Election of the Executive Board Members shall be conducted at the final General Meeting of each fall semester.
- C. At the time of elections, a simple majority of the Senate shall appoint a temporary Chair to oversee the election process from among the Senators present. The temporary chair may not be under consideration for any Executive Board position.
- D. Executive Board Members are elected for a term starting at the end of the current fall semester and lasting until the end of the following fall semester.
- E. All Senators and Executive Board Members present at the meeting of an election are eligible to vote in that election.
- F. In the event an officer, excluding the president, will take office and for some reason be unable or unwilling to complete their term of office, a special meeting will be called, and

a special election held to fill the vacated office for the remainder of the vacating officer's term.

## **Section 5: Removal of Executive Board Members**

- A. Any Executive Board member may be removed from office by a two-thirds majority vote of all recognized Senators.
- B. A process for removing Executive Board members shall be prescribed in the Bylaws.

# **Article V: President's Cabinet**

## **Section 1: Purpose**

The purpose of the President's Cabinet is to provide a mechanism for key constituency groups within the graduate and professional student community to have a voice in the policy-level work of the GPSS.

## **Section 2: Composition**

- A. Bylaws shall govern the composition of the President's Cabinet. At a minimum, the President's Cabinet shall be comprised of:
  - a. the President;
  - b. the Graduate Student Representative to the Board of Visitors or their designee;
  - c. The head of the Roanoke campus graduate and professional student organization;
  - d. The head of the Northern Virginia campus graduate and professional student organization; and
  - e. The Immediate Past President.
- B. Additional members of the Cabinet may be appointed by the President.
- C. The President shall chair the President's Cabinet.

## **Section 3: Immediate Past President**

- A. The purpose of the position of Immediate Past President is to maintain institutional memory.
- B. The Immediate Past President shall be either the immediate past President or Vice-President.
- C. At the end of a President's term, they automatically assume the role as Immediate Past President. If the President has graduated or is otherwise unable to hold this position, the last member serving as Vice-President under that President shall hold this position.
- D. If the previous President and Vice-President are unable or unwilling to hold this position, the Executive Board shall function with this role open.

# **Article VI: University Governance**

## **Section 1: Eligibility**

All current graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech shall be eligible to serve on University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees as representatives of GPSS

## **Section 2: Selection of representatives**

- A. Appointments and nominations to the University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees will be recommended by the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs for approval by the GPSS.
- B. Any graduate and professional student representatives to the University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees will be elected by the GPSS by a simple majority vote of the GPSS eligible to vote and present at the meeting.

## **Section 3: Representative Responsibilities**

- A. Representatives to University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees shall:
  - a. Represent the position of the GPSS in the discharge of responsibilities.
  - b. Inform the GPSS of pertinent matters to be considered and action taken by either:
    - i. Forwarding copies of meeting minutes to the Vice President within ten business days after approval of minutes by the respective University Council, Commission, Advisory Council, or Committee,
    - ii. Summarizing discussions and actions taken at meetings of each University Council, Commission, Advisory Council, or Committee and forwarding to the Vice President within ten business days after each meeting if no official minutes are kept at the meeting, or
    - iii. Bringing matters of GPSS concern before the respective University Council, Commissions, Advisory Councils, or Committees.

# **Article VII: Constitutional Amendments**

- A. Any Senator or officer may propose a change to this Constitution.
- B. Proposed amendments to the GPSS Constitution shall be submitted to the Senate, through the Vice President, and included in the GPSS agenda for consideration.
- C. Any proposed amendment shall have a minimum of two readings prior to voting and may be voted upon at the same meeting as the second reading.
- D. Any amendment requires a two-thirds majority of the entire Senate to pass.
- E. Amendments to the Constitution will become effective upon approval by the Senate, University Council and president of the university.
- F. If this Constitution shall be replaced by a new document, it is subject to the same procedures as if it were amended.

- G. Corrections of typographical or grammatical errors and updating terminology, where appropriate, are permitted without going through the amendment process. Such changes shall be reported to the GPSS and, without objection from any Senator, shall become official.

## **Article VIII: Amendments to the Bylaws**

- A. Any Senator or officer may propose a change to the Bylaws.
- B. Bylaws and their amendments shall be submitted to the Senate, through the Vice President, and included in the GPSS agenda for consideration.
- C. Bylaws and their amendments shall require a simple majority of Senators present to pass and shall become effective upon approval.



# Staff Senate

<http://www.staffsenate.vt.edu/>

**2020-2021**

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

**President: Tamarah Smith**  
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April 2, 2021

**To: Vice President of Policy and Governance**

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and approves GSA Resolution 2020-2021B. The Staff Senate is in support of this resolution.

**Thank you,**  
**LaTawnya Burleson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and Issues Committee**