



Constitution Guidelines for Student Organizations

Introduction

A constitution guides an organization in its operations and activities and, accordingly, is intended primarily for the organization's benefit and use. The constitution should contain the fundamental principles and structure of the organization.

Constitutions should be carefully formulated, clearly worded, and kept up-to-date so that the needs of the organization can be met. Furthermore, each member of the organization should have a copy of the constitution.

The following outline is provided to assist in the preparation of your constitution. If you have any problems, questions, or concerns regarding your constitution, please contact the UOSA General Counsel's Office in OMU 189, at 325-5474, or e-mail gc@ou.edu. Information about student organization constitutions is also available at www.ou.edu/uosagc.

Submission and Approval

Three copies of your constitution must be provided to the Student Life Office in the fall of every odd year (e.g., 2003, 2005, etc.) and every time the constitution is amended. The constitution must be approved by the UOSA General Counsel's Office in order for your organization to achieve Registered Student Organization Status and the accompanying benefits. Items marked with a "‡" must be included in order for your organization's constitution to be approved.

If your organization's constitution is not approved, your organization will receive a letter from the UOSA General Counsel's Office advising you of the necessary changes and providing you with a new due date. Each organization must continue to submit constitutions for UOSA General Counsel approval until the organization receives a letter from the UOSA General Counsel approving the organization's constitution.

Model Constitution

The following sample constitution provides a framework for your organization's constitution. The constitution should be simple, yet comprehensive.

Article I – Name and Purpose

Section 1 – Name

- ‡Your organization's name must clearly identify the organization. Also, as provided in Title 10 § 3 of the Student Code, neither the name nor the acronym of your organization may contain a trademark of the University. University trademarks include "OU" and "University of Oklahoma."
- "Sooner" and "Sooners" are also trademarks of the University, but student organizations *are* allowed to use them so long as they complete and submit a non-commercial license. The license form is available from Sarah Tarant's office in the Center for Student Life.
- Thus, the following names would be impermissible:

- “OU Chess Club,”
- “University of Oklahoma Chess Club,” and
- “Chess Club of the University of Oklahoma”
- Examples of permissible names include (but are not limited to):
 - Sooner Chess Club,
 - Students’ Chess Club,
 - Oklahoma Chess Club, and
 - Oklahoma Students’ Chess Club, A Registered Student Organization of the University of Oklahoma. (*Please note: the phrase “A Registered Student Organization of the University of Oklahoma” is the **only** permissible use of the trademark “University of Oklahoma.”*)
- In order to use the word “Oklahoma” in the group’s name, student organizations must complete a Student Organization Licensing Agreement, which can be found in Suite 370 of the Center for Student Life.
- Organizations must apply to use University logos and insignia (such as the linked "OU" and "Sooner Schooner") on merchandise, sportswear, printed materials, etc. Requests must be submitted first to the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs. If approved by the Vice President, the request will be forwarded to OU Trademark Licensing for consideration.

Section 2 – Purpose

- ‡All constitutions must contain a purpose statement (10 SC 4.2(b)).
- The purpose statement should include a complete statement of the purpose and objectives of the organization.

Article II – Membership, Qualifications, and Non-Discrimination Policy

Section 1 – Membership

- The Student Code only recognizes two types of membership: members and associate members. 10 SC 4.2(c)
- ‡Only University of Oklahoma students may be full members.
- ‡Members of the University community (faculty, staff, spouses) may be associate members, if your organization chooses to allow associate membership.
- There are no other types of membership. Specifically, the Student Code does not allow for alumni or honorary memberships nor does it allow an organization to grant membership to students attending another university.

Section 2 – Qualifications

- Organizations may set reasonable, lawful qualifications for members.
- Examples of qualifications would include, but are not limited to, the following: minimum GPA, classification, major, interest.

Section 3 – Non-Discrimination Policy

- ‡All constitutions must include a non-discrimination policy, as set forth in 10 SC 1. Using the following phrase will ensure that your organization complies with this regulation:
 - “Membership in, association with, and benefits emanating from (*name of organization*) and its related activities shall be based upon such considerations as performance, educational achievement, and other criteria related to the goals of the

organization and purposes of the activities. Judgments in this regard based solely on an individual's race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, marital status, or political belief are not judgments based on such considerations. Further, the purpose of the organization must be consistent with public policy as established by prevailing University Community standards.”

- In responding to a written complaint that a recognized student organization has inappropriately denied membership to a student, UOSA shall consider whether the student organization has improperly judged a student based solely on the student's race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, marital status or political belief.
- There are constitutionally mandated instances where a student organization must be allowed to discriminate based on the above criteria if the very nature of the student organization is dependent on one of those factors. For example, there may be times a student organization has a constitutional right to require their members and officers adhere to the organization's statement of faith, or its statement of core principles and/or its rules of conduct. The student organization bears the burden of demonstrating that the purported discrimination is constitutionally or federally mandated. Nothing in this policy should be construed to abridge the constitutional rights of student organizations to freedom of speech, association, and free exercise of religion. These types of determinations are fact-intensive and subject to prevailing federal and state laws. Before a decision based on a student organization's policies is made, UOSA General Counsel may seek the advice of the University's Office of Legal Counsel.

Article III – Organization Leadership: Titles, Terms of Office, Type of Selection, and Duties of Leaders

Section 1 – Titles

- Examples would include, but are not limited to, the following: President, Secretary, Historian, Publicity Chair, Webmaster, etc.

Section 2 – Terms of Office

- ‡Student officers must be students at the University of Oklahoma. Therefore, if a student ceases to be an OU student, that student can no longer serve as an officer.

Section 3 – Type of Selection

- Your organization can decide whether officers will be elected or appointed, who makes the decision to elect/appoint, and what percentage of members must agree.

Section 4 – Duties of Leaders

- Officer duties and responsibilities should be clearly defined for each officer.

Article IV – Advisor: Qualifications, Responsibilities, and Role in Organization

Section 1 – Qualifications

- ‡Each organization must have an advisor who is a full-time member of the University faculty or staff. 10 SC 4.2(d). Your organization's constitution must contain a clause stating:

- “(Name of organization) shall have as an adviser a full-time member of the University faculty or staff.”
- Your organization can specify other qualifications for your advisor. For example, you can require your advisor be a member of a particular college or hold membership in a national organization. These qualifications are in addition to, not in place of, the requirement the advisor be a full-time member of the University faculty or staff.

Section 2 – Responsibilities

- Generally, the advisor serves as a liaison between the organization and the administration.
- Any responsibilities of the advisor should be clearly described.

Section 3 – Role in Organization

- Your organization can decide what level of control the advisor can exercise. Your constitution should specify whether your advisor can vote, your advisor’s role in constitutional amendments, your advisor’s role in dismissing an officer/member, etc.

Article V – Executive Committee or other Committee (If Needed): Size and Composition of the Committee(s) –

Committees represent the general membership, conduct business of the organization between general meetings of the membership, and report their actions at the general meetings. The committees may be comprised of the organization leaders, chairpersons of standing committees, and, sometimes, ex officio positions from related student organizations. Examples of committees are Executive, Public Service, and temporary committees charged with completion of a specific project.

Section 1 – Name of Committee

Section 2 – Members of Committee

Section 3 – Duties/Responsibilities of Committee

Article VI – Meeting of the Organization: Required Meetings, Frequency, Notification of, and Attendance

Section 1 – Required Meetings

- Your organization may want to specify that students are required to attend 2, or 5, or 50% of all meetings to be considered a member of the organization.

Section 2 – Frequency

- Your organization may decide to hold meetings every Monday, the 3rd Thursday of the month, or on an as needed basis.

Section 3 – Notification of Meetings

- Your organization should have some procedure for notifying members and interested students of your meetings. Such notification might come in the form of e-mails, flyers, announcements in the *OU Daily*, or some combination thereof.
- Your organization may want to specify that no meeting can be held without a certain amount of notice (e.g., 48 hours or 3 class days).
- Your organization should also have a procedure for notifying members of emergency meetings.

Section 4 – Attendance

- Your organization may specify that only a certain number of absences are permissible or that failure to attend a meeting will result in a certain penalty.

- If your organization requires attendance, your organization should have a process for deciding when a member might be exempt (e.g., emergency situations).

Article VII – Method of Amending Constitution: Proposals, Notice, and Voting Requirement

Section 1 – Proposals

- Proposed amendments should be in writing, should not be acted upon but read in the general meeting in which they are proposed, should be read again at a specified number of subsequent general meetings, and should be read again at the general meeting in which the vote will be taken.

Section 2 – Notice

- Your organization may specify how you will ensure notification that a constitutional amendment has been proposed and when it will be voted upon.

Section 3 – Voting Requirement

- Your constitution should specify what percentage of your organization’s members is necessary to amend the constitution (e.g., 2/3 or 3/4).
- ‡Your organization must ensure that three copies of the amended constitution are submitted to Sarah Tarrant in the Center for Student Life every time an amendment is made.

Article VIII – Miscellaneous Procedures: Quorum, Dissolution of Organization, Impeachment of Officers and Members, Parliamentary Authority, Etc.

There are many other provisions which may be appropriate to include in your organization’s constitution. For suggestions on issues to include, review *Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised*; available at www.rulesonline.com. In the alternative, your constitution can specify that anything not covered in the constitution will be governed by *Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised*.

Article IX – Preemption Statement

‡Section 1 – Preemption Statement

- If your organization is governed by a national or parent organization, your constitution must include the following statement: “If there is a conflict between our national or parent organization’s rulings, constitution, or direction and the University of Oklahoma Student Code, the Student Code preempts the national or parent ruling.”
- If your organization is not governed by a national or parent organization, instead of the clause above, you should include a clause stating that your organization is independent from any national or parent organization.

This document provides a guideline for student organizations. There may be additional information included in or excluded from your organization’s constitution which would result in its noncompliance. All issues of compliance are reserved for the UOSA General Counsel’s office.

Information Adapted From Ohio State’s “Constitution and By-Laws for Student Organizations.”
 This document may only be revised by the UOSA General Counsel, in consultation with the Vice President for Student Affairs.
 Revised August 25, 2005 by UOSA General Counsel’s Office, in consultation with the Vice President for Student Affairs.