

Student Organization Constitution Guidelines

Contents

Purpose and Use	1
Requirement Checklist	2
Constitution Formatting & Outline.....	2
By-Laws Formatting & Outline	5
Sample Constitution – Squirrel Fan Club	6

Purpose and Use

The constitution guides an organization in its operations and activities and, accordingly, is intended primarily for the organization’s benefit and use. The constitution contains the fundamental principles and structure of the organization, and the basic rules of procedure by which a group’s membership govern their organization.

The Constitution will be the guide in a consistent and fair standard of consideration of new organizations and evaluating continuing organizations. The Student Organization Development Committee of the Otterbein University Student Government will use the following criteria as its guidelines in the review of new and edited Constitutions and consideration for the approval of new student organizations at Otterbein University.

The constitution should be carefully formulated, clearly worded, and kept up-to-date so that the needs of the organization can be met. It is recommended that each member of an organization have access to a copy of the constitution.

The constitution should be simple yet comprehensive and difficult to amend, leaving any specific procedural rules to be included in the by-laws (if applicable). When amending the constitution, as with the by-laws, previous notice of any proposed changes are usually required to be given to the membership and should not be changed in the same meeting in which proposed.

The Center for Student Involvement can also assist you in the development of your Constitution prior to submission to the Student Organization Development Committee.

Requirement Checklist

Constitutions must include the following:

- The organization should have a name not presently used by any other recognized student organization.
- The purpose of the organization should be clearly stated.
- Officers' requirements and functions must be stated.
- Procedures for elections of officers must be stated along with the voting margins of elections, i.e. simple majority or plurality.
- The organization must have at least one advisor who is an Otterbein employee.
- Meeting requirements must be stated (i.e., how many times a week, month, etc.).
- Attendance requirements must be specified. If there are no attendance requirements, this must be stated as well.
- Expulsion requirements and procedures must be specified for officers and/or members.
- Financial obligations of members must be specified. If there are no financial requirements, this must be stated as well.
- Processes for amendments to the Constitution must be stated, including the statement, "Amendments to the Constitution take effect immediately upon review and approval by the Student Organization Development Committee of the Otterbein University Student Government."
- The following non-discrimination statement must be included, verbatim, "Any student of Otterbein University regardless of sex, marital or parental status, race, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, genetic information, military status, or veteran status is eligible for membership in this organization." (Registered social fraternities and sororities may exclude "sex" from their non-discrimination statement).
- All organizations must be open to all students with the exception of the following classifications of groups, which are permitted to have eligibility requirements: Academic and Professional, Fraternities and Sororities, Honor Societies. The Student Organization Development Committee, in collaboration with the Center for Student Involvement, will determine if an organization's classification is appropriate during chartering and renewal.

Constitution Formatting & Outline

The following outline is provided to assist in the preparation of a constitution and, if needed, by-laws. Use this guide to prepare the constitution for your new student organization. An electronic copy of the constitution is required by the Center for Student Involvement when you first register your organization and is required to be updated and reviewed every 2 years. If there are any problems or concerns with your constitution, a member of the CSI staff will contact you.

Article I - Name, Purpose, and Non-Discrimination Policy of the Organization.

Section 1 - Name

The name may not be currently in use. Be thoughtful of the use of Otterbein or Otterbein University in your name as this will affect your alphabetical listing. If your organization is

affiliated with a national or international organization, details of the affiliation should be described.

Section 2 – Purpose

Organizations should take care to include a complete statement of purpose and objectives. Programs sponsored by the organization must align and be consistent with the organization’s stated purpose and objectives.

Section 3 - Non-Discrimination Policy

All student organizations desiring to be recognized by the University must include in their constitution a non-discrimination statement that will generally be at least as broad as the University’s Non-Discrimination policy statement. Where applicable, a student organization may adopt a statement that reflects its eligibility criteria for Student Officers.

The required non-discrimination policy statement is as follows:

Any student of Otterbein University regardless of sex, marital or parental status, race, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, genetic information, military status, or veteran status is eligible for membership in this organization.

Article II – Membership

Qualifications and categories of membership, including how do you define a “member.” Voting membership should be defined as limited to currently enrolled Otterbein students. Others such as faculty, alumni, professionals, etc. are encouraged to become members but as non-voting associate or honorary members. For educational and leadership development reasons, student organizations are to be student initiated, student led, and student run. Non-student members cannot benefit from Student Life Fee funding.

Article III - Organization Leadership

Include titles, terms of office, type of selection/election process, and duties of the leaders. Organization leaders represent the Executive Committee and general membership and are elected or appointed from the ranks of the organization’s voting membership. The titles of organization leaders, the length of terms, specification as to which leaders are elected or appointed and by whom, and the general duties of each leadership position should be clearly specified. Organizations need to have the necessary leaders to conduct their activities.

Article IV - Executive Committee (or other appropriate time, if needed)

Include size and composition of the organization leadership. This Committee (like a board of trustees or directors) represents the general membership and conducts business of the organization between general meetings of the membership and reports its actions at the general meetings of the membership. In many organizations, this Committee is comprised of the organization leaders, chairpersons of the other committees, advisor, and sometimes ex officio members from related student organizations.

Article V – Standing/Other Committees (if needed)

Names, purposes, and composition. These committees serve the organization leadership, Executive Committee, and general membership and are permanent and designed to carry out the basic functions of the organization. Identify the method by which Chairs are elected/selected, including voting margin, if applicable.

Article VI – Method of Selecting and/or Removing Officers and Members

The constitution should describe the process by which members are selected. General members should be expected to meet certain standards and conduct themselves in a way that reflects well on the organization. In the event that a member or leader does not meet those expectations, the organization should have procedures in place for objectively considering the member's or leader's probationary membership status or removal from the organization. The process described in the constitution should specify who conducts this review and ultimately makes the decision. It should be noted that the organization's non-discrimination policy should protect members from removal based on those listed statuses.

Article VII – Advisor(s) or Advisory Board: Qualification Criteria

At least one advisor of the student organization must be a University faculty or staff member. Responsibilities and expectations of advisors should be clearly and adequately described.

Article VIII – Meetings of the Organization

Required meetings and their frequency are specified here. For instance, two general meetings of the membership may be required each academic term except for summer.

Article IX – Method of Amending Constitution

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 the general meeting in which the votes will be taken. Approval should require at least two-thirds of voting members present (and to conduct any business an organization should have quorum present at a business meeting, which is at minimum 50% + 1 of total organization members). The constitution should not be amended easily or frequently. In addition to the organization's process, must conclude with the statement, "Amendments to the Constitution take effect immediately upon review and approval by the Student Organization Development Committee of the Otterbein University Student Government."

Article X – Method of Dissolution of Organization

Requirements and procedures for dissolution of the student organization should be stated. Should any organization assets and debt exist, appropriate means for disposing of these assets and debts should be specified clearly and unequivocally.

By-Laws Formatting & Outline

By-laws contain the standing (permanent) rules of procedure of an organization. Articles in the by-laws may be covered in appropriate detail in the constitution of very small or new organizations. However, most groups keep separate by-laws because they usually contain more detail and are subject to change more than that of the constitution and, therefore, may require different procedures for amending.

Provision for amendment of the by-laws should be somewhat easier than that of the constitution as rules of procedure should adapt to changing conditions of the student organization. When amending the by-laws, as with the constitution, previous notice of any changes is usually required to be given to the membership and should not be changed in the same meeting in which proposed. By-laws are more permanent, however, than passing a general motion, which may require only a simple majority vote of voters present at a general meeting of the membership (a quorum being present). By-laws cannot run contrary to the constitution.

Article I – Parliamentary Authority

Most organizations use Robert’s Rule of Order to govern their organization’s decision making except when these rules are inconsistent with their constitution or by-laws of the organization. These rules are of Western cultural origin, and based on the premise that “though the minority shall be heard and absentees protected, the majority will decide.”

A recommended wording is “The rules contained in [specify the source for parliamentary practice] shall govern the organization in all cases to which they are applicable, and in which they are not inconsistent with the by-laws of this organization.”

Article II - Membership

Procedures for becoming a member, which may vary by membership category, amount of dues, if any, and how often they should be paid, termination of membership, and so on should be described in detail.

Section 1 – Financial Obligation of Membership

Describe the financial obligation of membership including the frequency of the obligation (one-time, annually, per semester) or state there is no financial obligation.

Article III - Election

Elections rules and procedures, including eligibility for office, the nominating process, design of ballots and balloting procedures, and so on should be specified as well as appointment and ratification procedures. The timing of elections and/or appointments should be specified along with procedures to cover special circumstances (resignations, impeachments, etc.).

Article IV - Executive Committee (or other appropriate time, if needed)

Specific duties of the Committee and its responsibilities to the membership.

Article V - Standing/Other Committees (if needed)

Specific duties of each committee and their responsibilities to the organization leadership, Executive Committee, and general membership.

Article VI - Advisor/Advisory Board Responsibilities

Expectations of the advisor in the organization (e.g., availability, meeting attendance, second signer on checks, etc.)

Article VII - Meeting Requirements

Regular, special, size and determination of quorum (number of voting members required to vote on decisions placed before the general membership, executive, and standing committees).

Article VIII - Method of Amending By-Laws

Should be similar to amending the constitution. However, by-laws are apt to change more often than the constitution, thus amending should be somewhat easier. By-laws may be amended by proposing in writing and reading the change at a general meeting of the membership and then bring the proposed change up for a vote at the next general meeting with a 2/3 majority vote of the membership present (a quorum being present). In addition to the organization's process, must conclude with the statement, "Amendments to the Constitution take effect immediately upon review and approval by the Student Organization Development Committee of the Otterbein University Student Government."

Reviewed and approved by the organization on: DATE

Each Constitution and/or By-Laws must include the date it was approved by the organization.

Note - Some organizations desire a structure that is fundamentally different from the guidelines presented here. Under these circumstances, the organization should contact the Center for Student Involvement to assist in the design of an alternate structure. The goal would be to incorporate basic principles important to the University while promoting those of the organization.

Sample Constitution – Squirrel Fan Club

Article I - Name, Purpose, and Non-Discrimination Policy of the Organization.

Section 1 - Name

The name of the organization shall be the Otterbein University Squirrel Fan Club, or the abbreviated name Squirrel Fan Club.

Section 2 – Purpose

The purpose of the organization is to promote the general awareness and education about squirrels on campus including appreciation of squirrels and their habitat.

Section 3 - Non-Discrimination Policy

Any student of Otterbein University regardless of sex, marital or parental status, race, color, religion, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, genetic information, military status, or veteran status is eligible for membership in this organization.

Article II – Membership

Section 1 – Membership Defined

Any Otterbein student who attends at least 2 regular meetings in an academic year will be considered a member and eligible to vote on business of the organization. Faculty, alumni, and Otterbein University staff may be honorary and non-voting members of the organization.

Section 2 – Financial Obligation of Membership

There is no financial obligation to be a member.

Article III - Organization Leadership

The leadership team of the organization shall be composed of the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer elected at the last student organization meeting in March. The elected officers will then serve from April – April.

Section 1 – President

The President shall preside over all meetings, initiate committees, and appoint committee chairpersons. The President shall have the power to fill any vacancies that occur.

Section 2 – Vice President

The Vice President shall assume the duties of the President in his/her absence or if he/she is incapable of performing said duties. The Vice President shall also be responsible for coordinating social media and organization archives.

Section 3 – Secretary

The Secretary shall record the minutes of all meetings of the organization and handle distribution of same when appropriate. They shall be responsible for attendance and documenting membership.

Section 4 – Treasurer

The Treasurer shall collect and be responsible for all donations and fundraising efforts by the organization. The Treasurer shall maintain a budget for the organization and present an itemized account of the condition of the budget at all regularly scheduled meetings.

Article IV - Standing Committees

The Standing Committees shall be Squirrel Appreciation and Squirrel Education. Ad-hoc committees may be created by the President as needed. Committee chairs are appointed by the Leadership Team and may not include the President or Vice President.

Section 1 – Squirrel Appreciation

The Squirrel Appreciation Committee will be responsible for hosting one event per semester for the purpose of appreciating our campus squirrel population.

Section 2 – Squirrel Education

The Squirrel Education Committee will be responsible for planning at least one event per semester to educate members of the Squirrel Fan Club more about squirrels.

Article V – Removal/Expulsion

Section 1 – Officer Removal/Expulsion

Any officer not fulfilling their job responsibilities may be nominated for removal by any other officer if other means of addressing the concern, including advisor intervention, are not successful. The officer in question may be removed by 2/3 vote of the officers remaining. Any officer with less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA will be put on probation after the first semester and removed from office if a cumulative GPA of greater than 2.0 is not achieved. Any officer placed on judicial probation or greater may be eligible for removal depending on the severity of the violation.

Section 2 – Member Removal/Expulsion

Members are not removed or expelled but may remove themselves from the membership roster at any time.

Article VI – Advisor(s)

There shall be at least one advisor who is a member of the University faculty or staff. The advisor shall have an interest in squirrels and the ability to regularly commit to attending organization meetings and meeting with officers.

Article VIII – Meetings of the Organization

Meetings shall be held at least once a month at a time most convenient for the officers, advisor, and a majority of members.

Article IX – Method of Amending Constitution

Proposed amendments should be submitted in writing to the Leadership Team and shall be scheduled for 1st reading at a meeting. They will be voted on at the next scheduled meeting. Approval for amendments requires 2/3 vote of the voting membership present at the meeting. Amendments to the Constitution take effect immediately upon review and approval by the Student Organization Development Committee of the Otterbein University Student Government.

Article X – Method of Dissolution of Organization

Should the organization wish to dissolve they may do so in collaboration with the advisor and the Center for Student Involvement. Dissolution may not occur when there are outstanding organization debts. Any assets of the organization shall be contributed to the Center for Student Involvement for the purpose of organization support and resources.

Article XI – Parliamentary Authority

The rules contained in Robert’s Rules of Order shall govern the organization in all cases to which they are applicable, and in which they are not inconsistent with the by-laws of this organization.

Reviewed and approved by the organization on: March 11, 2016