

Report of the University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) on Charge S-2005

Charge S-2005: Student Governance: Evaluate the formal and informal processes for the creation of student governing associations and if appropriate, make recommendations regarding the organization and recognition of SGAs.

Background

This was one of eight charges proposed by a senator in January 2020 on the release of the new online form. The background provided read:

University Policies concerning the University Senate reference student governing associations, and faculty and staff councils. These bodies are also referenced in other parts of university policies. For example, SGAs are referenced in policies enacted in the Board of Governors pertaining to allocating student activities fees, despite SGAs not being defined in the Policy Library. The Senate also previously looked at the lack of recognition within the health science system of councils. It may be beneficial to establish policy (1) recognizing the SGAs and councils exist currently (e.g., in New Brunswick: the NB Faculty Council, the staff council, RUSA as the SAS and campus-wide undergraduate SGA, EGC, MGSGA, RBGA, SGC, PGC, GSA, etc.); (2) to provide for a process for the establishment of such a body (for SGAs, the informal policy has been a student referendum with at least 10% participation); and (3) protections to ensure that such bodies cannot be dissolved or modified without their consent. It would be prudent for the committee to evaluate the prospect of implementing such a policy.

The Executive Committee agreed to charge this to the University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) as requested, but concluded that input from the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) would be appropriate, and hence issued a similar charge (S-2004) to the SAC to provide recommendations to the University Structure and Governance Committee by December 2020.

In October and November 2020, members of the USGC gathered what information they could regarding Student Governing Associations (SGAs) on their own campuses.

SAC provided its recommendations on December 10, 2020 (see Appendix A). The main points were recommendations regarding:

- the potential value of additional research that SAC did not have time and resources to conduct
- creating and disseminating transparent procedures regarding the creation and maintenance of SGAs where they do not currently exist
- greater consistency across campus as regards mission, vision, and philosophy of SGAs

Considerations

In initial discussions of this charge at the December 2020 USGC meeting, concerns were expressed that:

- the creation of the charge was not based on any actual known problem or difficulty in creating a SGA at any time, but appeared to be hypothetical
- limited information is available as to how or under what procedures existing SGAs were created
- existing SGAs in Newark, New Brunswick and Camden have evolved in very different ways, and this is perhaps testimony to the value and usefulness of diversity rather than an argument for the need for increased consistency across campuses, since they seem to operate in different ways to the apparent satisfaction of their respective communities
- although the Senate has an interest in the election of Senators from the student bodies on the various campuses, this interest is properly limited to knowing that senators are in fact duly elected in a representative way—and by itself this does not require the imposition of centralized procedures for the formation of SGAs or for their operation, which may better be left to campuses to suit local conditions.

A joint meeting between the USGC and the SAC was held to discuss this charge on January 15, 2021. In these discussions, it was agreed that neither committee had the time within the reporting deadlines to conduct external research, though such research might be possible, interesting, and potentially useful in the future. The discussions also covered the absence of any specific problem occasioning the charges and requiring immediate redress. It is, of course, possible that in the light of changed information, further charges could be raised by the Executive Committee, and additional recommendations made for changes in procedures, but it was concluded that, at this time, the emphasis should be on publicizing existing procedures in a transparent way.

The USGC further discussed perceived problems with the creation of SGAs and potential remedies at its regular meeting in January, 2021, and discussed and approved the following recommendations at its February meeting. Central to these were the Senate's interest in ensuring that senators are properly elected, and the view that neither the Senate nor Rutgers central administration is best placed to devise procedures for the formation and management of SGAs, but that this is best carried out at a local level, campus by campus. The USGC and the Senate could certainly discuss any proposed procedures before they are implemented and provide whatever input seems appropriate at the time; since this matter is important but not time-critical, this seems to be a reasonable prospect.

Recommendations

1. Include the following as a final sentence in University Policy 50.2.1.6.C (concerning student representation on the University Senate).

Student Senators shall be elected by students in their respective units. The precise mode of election – whether by the entire student body of the unit or by a student governance association or equivalent student representative body in the unit – shall be left to the practice of individual units.

2. Chancellors should create and regularly update comprehensive lists, available on easily discoverable web sites, of all the student representative bodies in the academic and other units under their purview, along with links to those bodies' web pages, bylaws (if any), and other relevant information.
3. Each campus should develop guidance for students regarding requirements and procedures for setting up or re-establishing student representative bodies where they do not exist or have been inactive, should ensure that students are aware that the guidelines exist, and should ensure that the requirements and procedures are readily available to students.
4. The Senate should be afforded the opportunity to review such procedures and provide any relevant input as and when they are forthcoming.
5. For purposes of recommendations 2 and 3, "student representative bodies" includes:
 - a. student governing associations or their equivalents in academic units
 - b. similar cross-unit organizations
 - c. student councils or their equivalents in residential colleges, residential units, or groups of residential units.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Rutgers University Senate recommends:

1. that the following be added as a final sentence in University Policy 50.2.1.6.C (concerning student representation on the University Senate).

Student Senators shall be elected by students in their respective units. The precise mode of election – whether by the entire student body of the unit or by a student governance association or equivalent student representative body in the unit – shall be left to the practice of individual units.

2. that Chancellors create and regularly update comprehensive lists, available on easily discoverable web sites, of all the student representative bodies* in the academic and other units under their purview, along with links to those bodies' web pages, bylaws (if any), and other relevant information.
3. that each campus develop guidance for students regarding requirements and procedures for setting up or re-establishing student representative bodies* where they do not exist or have been inactive, ensure that students are aware that the guidelines exist, and ensure that the requirements and procedures are readily available to students.

- * For purposes of recommendations 2 and 3, "student representative bodies" includes:
- a. student governing associations or their equivalents in academic units
 - b. similar cross-unit organizations
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Wayne, Robert, NJMS (S)

S-2004 – Student Governance **APPENDIX A**

Evaluate the formal and informal processes for the creation of student governing associations and if appropriate, make recommendations regarding the organization and recognition of SGAs. Provide recommendations to the University Structure and Governance Committee by December 2020.

Introduction

Although referenced in various University policies, there is not a clear understanding of the landscape of Student Governing Associations (SGAs) across the University or the processes for creating, organizing, or maintaining SGAs. As a first step, the Student Affairs Committee has conducted initial research and outlined preliminary recommendations for the University Structure and Governance Committee to consider.

Research Conducted and Summary of Findings

To address this charge, the Student Affairs Committee created a sub-committee composed of faculty, staff, and students from the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick campuses. Our aim was to gather information and resources to better understand the creation and operation of SGAs. Below is a summary of our findings regarding the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick campuses. Supporting documents referenced in this report also are provided in a shared google drive.

Camden Campus

When researching the initiation process of Student Governing Associations on the Camden Campus, we were unable to find substantive information, timeline or any processes/procedures of how to go about creating and maintaining SGAs. To better understand the internal processes of Student Governing Associations on the Camden Campus, our subcommittee spoke to former SAC member Doris Zheng, Vice President Rutgers University- Camden Student Governing Association. Zheng outlined for the committee the election process indicating that the formal election process involves the completion of a petition where a potential candidate must obtain a number of student signatures to be placed on the ballot. A president and vice president debate is usually held, along with other events planned by the Elections Committee of which the Vice President acts as chair, to boost candidate visibility and reach.

Below is an excerpt from the SGA constitution to clarify what happens in an event of vacancies,

"Section 5. The SGA must fill all offices that become vacant. Nominations for the office will be taken from the SGA with proper notification through campus media that may include but is not limited to, the following:

WCCR (radio station), The Gleaner and Minding Your Business (student newspapers), campus-wide emails, flyers, or typewritten notification posted on official school bulletin boards. The SGA will then hold an election to determine who will serve in the vacant office. The candidate must win by a majority vote of the SGA. If on the first ballot, no one receives a majority vote, another vote will be taken. Each time a vote is taken and no one receives a majority vote, the candidate with the lowest amount of votes will be dropped. This process is repeated until one candidate receives a majority vote of the SGA.

If an office is to become vacant due to impeachment, resignation, graduation, etc., the SGA has the power to temporarily appoint someone to fill the vacant position so as not to interfere with the workings of the SGA and student organizations. The President will make the appointment, which must be approved by at least a 2/3 majority of the SGA."

Zheng indicated that elections have always followed the process described above, however, due to transition to a remote environment last Spring, their elections were conducted very differently. This new RUCSGA general body was elected based on a fair vote, but instead of the petition process, an application was open for students interested in running. Due to a lack of interest from students, all positions were uncontested and many vacancies exist. A deadline was set post-election to open a window of opportunity for additional interests, however seeing that the window has passed, the RUCSGA has moved to an appointment of officers given a 2/3 majority. Zheng indicated that this year has been quite a unique and difficult time for the RUCSGA, but they were always sure to maintain neutrality and give equal opportunity to all students.

Newark Campus

After talking to the Dean of Student Life on the Newark Campus, it became evident that the process of creating and maintaining the Newark Student Governing Association is nonexistent and arbitrary. Before 2008, there were two different SGAs, one under the Newark College of Arts & Sciences (NCAS), and the other was under University College (UC). The SGA set up under NCAS represented all other academic schools, including RBS, CJ, and SPAA. However, the SGA set up under UC was only representing UC students, who are usually non-traditional adult students who have work/family and other obligations during the day and attend classes in the evening. There is little to no written timeline or procedures that students followed in creating the SGA we know now.

One issue that is consistent with that of 2008 is the representation Rutgers Newark has on the University Senate. Because of the lack of interest students have in SGA, academic deans appointed students who they saw fit to serve on the University Senate. However, students were afraid that the Deans were selecting students interested in the interest of the school and administration rather than the students themselves. Therefore, the students then adjusted their charter and bylaws to reflect an election process for all University Senate positions. Nonetheless, students remained uninterested in the University Senate, and the positions remained empty and were not included in the election process. It wasn't until the spring Semester of 2019 when the Newark campus had one student represent SAS-N on the University Senate.

To better understand the election process of the SGA on the Newark campus, our committee spoke to the Elections Committee Chair of the Fall 2020 elections. We also referred to Level 700 Bylaws, Article I, Section, 7 "The Elections Committee shall set up a Candidate Forum for which candidates must participate in. This event

is to be held for both the General Election held in April for all positions within the Association and the New Students Senators Elections held in September. This event is to be hosted by the Association during the first free period of Elections week.” Elections precedent does not identify The Candidate Forum as a space for candidates to debate each other, but rather as a space for them to share their platform and the initiatives they plan to work on if elected. Article II of ByLaw 700 outlines the Elections Petitions that a candidate must complete. Section I states that “all candidates must submit an “Election Petition” form at least one week prior to the beginning of the election to the Office of Student Life and Leadership. Election Petitions must be finalized and made available to the student body by the first day of classes, or at least four weeks before the start of elections. All potential candidates must go to a “Candidates Information Session” hosted by the head of the Elections Committee, where they learn about the responsibilities of being a member of the Association as well as guidelines for campaigning. The time will be set by the Elections Committee at least two weeks before the start of elections. For clarification, a late (but not disqualified) petition shall be defined as submitting a petition after the first Candidates Information Session. Late candidates will inevitably have shorter time frames for campaigning. Candidates who submit petitions after the “Candidates Information Session” must meet with the head of the Elections Committee for a separate Candidates Information Session pending qualification by the Office of Student Life and Leadership. Only then will they be allowed to campaign.”

ByLaw 701, Article I, Sections 3 and 4 states that “ The Elections Committee is hereby vested with the authority to interpret, amend, or waive any provisions of the Level 700 By-Laws: “Elections By-Laws” where substantial reason so requires, contingent upon a two-thirds majority vote within the Elections Committee and with approval from the Dean of Students.” and “The Elections Committee is responsible for setting up both the General Elections and New Students Elections, which can also be called Spring Elections and Fall Elections, respectively. The elections are to be held in whichever manner the Elections Committee and the SGA feel is most likely to get the highest voter turnout.” The Chair of the Elections Committee informed us that due to the virtual setting in which the elections were held, the election procedures were changed to ensure that student interest and voter turnout would be maximized regardless of the virtual setting. Therefore, instead of the election petitions, the Fall 2020 Elections Committee created an Interest Form that students could fill out and submit to the Elections Committee and the Office of Student Life and Leadership.

[RUN-SGA Charter & ByLaws](#)

New Brunswick Campus

The universe of SGAs on the New Brunswick campus consists of the following:

- Rutgers University Student Assembly (RUSA)
- Cook College Council
- Douglass College Governing Association (DCGA)
- Engineering Governing Council
- Graduate Student Association
- Livingston College Governing Association
- Mason Gross School of the Arts Student Governing Association
- Pharmacy Governing Council
- Rutgers College Governing Association (RCGA)
- University College Governing Association (UCGA)

The RUSA Constitution specifies the structure of SGAs in Article I, Section 1.01, which states:

“Article I. Structure of Student Government. Section 1.01 Local Councils

Each campus or professional school council shall determine its rules and proceedings. The Assembly shall adopt no by-law or motion limiting the power or scope of the campus and professional school councils.

1. Campus Councils

Each individual campus will have a campus council, with an executive board, and elected representatives to serve on the Assembly. The Campus Councils shall be composed of membership from their respective campuses and will have legislative power for that jurisdiction. Each of the Campus Councils shall receive an equal number of University Senate seats representing the School of Arts and Sciences. The primary role of the campus councils will be to represent the student body for that particular campus. The Assembly may designate specific campus councils as residential college councils.

2. Professional Schools

The Professional schools shall have a representative council, independent of the campus councils, having legislative powers and an executive board, and elected representatives to serve on the Assembly. Membership shall be comprised of the professional school constituency. At the discretion of professional schools and campus councils these councils may determine their preferred government structure. Throughout this Constitution, the term ‘professional schools’ is assumed to include University College, a subset of the School of Arts and Sciences that provides additional services for non-traditional students, in all cases except for those dealing with allocations. A representative council for University College should exist with the same representation on the Assembly and University Senate as professional school councils.”

Furthermore, the RUSA Constitution details a Council of Presidents in Article I, Section 1.03, which states:

“Section 1.03 Council of Presidents

There shall exist a Council of Presidents consisting of the presidents of the campus councils and professional schools. The Chair of the Assembly shall preside over the meetings of the Council of Presidents. The Council of Presidents will be responsible for setting the agenda for the Assembly, and shall meet prior to each meeting of the Assembly. The Chair of the Assembly shall not be a president of a campus or professional school council.”

RUSA’s Constitution, Standing Rules, and By-Laws for RUSA Allocations are accessible here:

- [Constitution \(rutgers.edu\)](#)
- [This document will hereby serve as the Rutgers University Student Assembly \(RUSA\) Standing Rules.](#)
- [By-Laws of the RCGA Allocations Committee \(rutgers.edu\)](#)

The professional staff within Student Involvement advise RUSA and the RUSA Allocations Board. A link to their website can be accessed here:

- [Student Government and Funding – Student Centers and Activities: Organizations \(rutgers.edu\)](#)

The governing councils are advised by staff within the school (or the Douglass Residential College in case of the Douglass College Governing Association)

RUSA President Nicholas LaBelle issued Executive Order No. 2020-13 which would examine and compile documentation to the current structure, source, allocation procedure, and as much historical accounting. As well as addressing the inconsistencies found in election periods in respective student governments and promoting structural change to support civic Engagement. Finally, the EO would discuss the strategic vision of student governance and engagement with input from all three campuses: New Brunswick, Newark and Camden.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Zh0jLib9poFU2pntjqSunrghbIdV7wTv/view?usp=sharing>

Recommendations

Based on the initial research gathered, the Student Affairs Committee offers the following broad set of recommendations.

Regarding Additional Research to Conduct

- Much of the research we were able to gather related to the conduct of elections of existing SGAs rather than the processes in place to create or dissolve SGAs. Additional research in this area would better inform the final set of recommendations and subsequent resolution. That being said, such information is not easily attainable (see next set of recommendations).
- The Senate's understanding might also be enhanced if the research was conducted on how SGAs are created and maintained in our peer institutions (such as the other Big 10 Universities) and Universities with a similar (systems) organization.

Regarding Processes of Creating and Maintaining SGAs

- When processes are not in place on campuses regarding creating and maintaining SGAs, we recommend that procedures be outlined and transparent regarding the processes and that this information is disseminated/posted publicly and made more accessible and comprehensible.
- Given the differences in processes across campuses, it is worth considering ways in which there can be consistency across campuses while preserving the unique features and cultures of the various campuses. One recommendation may be more consistent wording across the campuses and schools, as any governance committee should have the same mission, vision and philosophy. Similarly, it is worth exploring opportunities for collaborations between SGAs across campuses so long as these collaborations are mutually beneficial.

Regarding Enhancing Participation in SGAs

- Recommendations related to enhancing student participation in SGAs also is worth exploring.
 - Current restrictions on participating and/or eligibility requirements for membership ought to be examined to make the organizations more inclusive and attractive to students.

- Incentives for participating also might be considered, including academic credit, tuition discounts/breaks.

Submitted by the Student Affairs Committee
December 10, 2020