

# Virginia Tech Graduate and Professional Student Senate Constitution

## Article I: Name, Mission, 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: Mission

The mission of the Graduate Senate is to serve as a voice for all graduate and professional 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 and professional students at Virginia Tech shall be entitled to the services and programs that the GPSS provides.
- C. GPSS shall governance shall be aided by three documents:
  - a. The Constitution of the GPSS shall define the functions, structures, and processes critical to the mission of the organization.
  - b. The Bylaws shall codify critical structures and operations of the GPSS. Bylaws include the written recording of all proposals, operating guidelines not specified in this Constitution, and funding requests.
  - 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 Senate is to serve as the legislative body of the GPSS, providing an equal voice for all entities represented.

## **Section 2: Membership**

- A. All current graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech who are in good academic standing shall be eligible to serve in the Senate.
- B. 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”).
- C. The Senate shall be comprised of Senators who may be appointed by the entities in Article II, Section 2(B).
- D. Each aforementioned entity may elect no more than one senator.
- E. 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 that Senator’s term ends or they otherwise resign.
- F. The process for selecting Senators shall be at the sole discretion of the entities in Article II, Section 2(B).

## **Section 3: Term**

- A. The term of a Senator shall begin on the first day of class in the academic year. If a Senator is recognized following the beginning of the academic year, their term shall begin upon Recognition.
- B. The term of a Senator shall end on the day preceding the first day of class in the academic year.
- 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. Inform constituents of GPSS proceedings, including and not limited to legislation and programs;

- C. Be available to constituents and communicate their concerns and issues to the Senate; and
- D. 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 two weeks' 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. Meetings may be held without a quorum, but votes cannot be taken.
- 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.

## **Section 6: Caucuses**

- A. Senators representing entities within the same college, department, or school shall be assigned to caucuses of the same, the purpose of which is to organize advocacy for needs at the college, department, or school level. Such caucuses shall be codified in the Bylaws.
- B. Senators may form additional caucuses based on affinity groups, advocacy issues, or other reasons.

# **Article III: Executive Board**

## **Section 1: Purpose**

The purpose of the Executive Board is to set strategic direction and provide efficient, effective execution of the policy 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 larger 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. Chief of Staff,
  - f. Director of Advocacy,
  - g. Director of Programs.
- B. The Executive Board may also contain the President Emeritus as a non-voting member.
- C. All current graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech who are in good academic standing shall be eligible to serve on the Senate and 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 allow them to aggressively pursue 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 as appropriate;
    - 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 related to University policies;
  - ii. With the consent of the Senate and the advice of the Executive Board, make all executive appointments and nominations except for personnel pertaining to GPSS Programs;
  - iii. Recommend to the GPSS nominations for representatives of the GPSS to University governance bodies, including the University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees;
  - iv. 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;
  - v. Maintain the Senate roster; and
  - vi. 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 GSA 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 members of the Executive Board 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 Assembly 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, the University Relations publications, the GPSS Website, and social media.

D. Director of Finance and Treasurer

- 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 mission.

E. 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 be ultimately responsible for the effective operation of all GPSS Events organized by the GPSS.
- c. The Chief of Staff shall:
  - i. Have general oversight of all GPSS operations;
  - ii. Aid any Committees established with completing their goals;
  - iii. Be ultimately responsible for the effective operation of all GPSS Events organized by the GPSS;
  - iv. Advise and assist the Executive Board on all matters related to GSA Events; and
  - v. Report relevant activities to the Senate at each Senate Meeting.

F. 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.

G. 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 execution and development 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 mission of the GPSS, and report findings to the Senate.

#### H. President Emeritus

- a. The President Emeritus serves to maintain institutional memory.
- b. The President Emeritus shall be held by either the immediate past President or Vice-President.
- c. At the end of a President's term, they automatically assume the role as President Emeritus. 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.
- e. The President Emeritus is a non-voting, advisory position.

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

- A. Elections by the GPSS 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  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of all recognized Senators.
- B. A process for removing Executive Board members shall be prescribed in the Bylaws.

# **Article IV: 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 President of the Roanoke campus GPSS; and
  - d. The President of the Northern Virginia campus GPSS.
- B. Additional members of the Cabinet may be appointed by the President.
- C. The President shall chair the President's Cabinet.

# **Article V: University Governance**

## **Section 1: Eligibility**

All current graduate and professional students at Virginia Tech who are in good academic standing shall be eligible to serve on University Council, its Commissions, and its Committees.

## **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 students 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
  - c. Forwarding copies of meeting minutes to the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs within ten business days after approval of minutes by the respective University Council, Commission, Advisory Council, or Committee, or
  - d. Summarizing discussions and actions taken at meetings of each University Council, Commission, Advisory Council, or Committee and forwarding to the Vice President and Director of Legislative Affairs within ten business days after each meeting if no official minutes are kept at the meeting.
  - e. Bring matters of GPSS concern before the respective University Council, Commissions, Advisory Councils, or Committees.

# **Article VI: GPSS Committees**

## **Section 1: Purpose**

The purpose of GPSS committees is to provide support for policy and operational activities.

## **Section 2: Standing Committees**

- A. Standing Committees and their membership shall be identified and defined in the Bylaws.
- B. Standing Committees shall make regular reports on their work to the Senate.

## **Section 3: Policy Committees**

- A. Any member of the Executive Board may appoint policy committees to aid in their specific activities, tasks, or initiatives.
- B. The Executive Board member appointing a policy committee shall have oversight over and responsibility for the policy committee.
- C. Policy 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 through the appointing Executive Board member reports summarizing their activities. All other policy committees Committees are encouraged, but not required, to draft and submit regular reports summarizing their activities.
- D. For the purpose of this Article, committees appointed by the Director of Programs shall be considered policy committees.

## **Section 4: Operational Committees**

- A. The majority of GPSS operational activity not done by the Executive Board or policy committee shall be done through the use of operational committees.
- B. The Chief of Staff shall have operational oversight over operational committees
- C. Operational committees shall be established through the use of Bylaws.
- D. Operational committees have the authority to plan, organize, and implement events and projects independent of the entire GPSS body, so long as these events and projects fall within the purview of that committee as specified in this Constitution or in Bylaws.
- E. Operational 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 through the Chief of Staff reports summarizing their activities. All other operational committees are encouraged, but not required, to draft and submit reports summarizing their activities.

## **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 Director of Legislative Affairs, 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.

## **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 Director of Legislative Affairs, 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.