

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Vanderbilt Divinity School

Constitution

Revised, April 2011

Article 1—Name

This organization shall be known as the Student Government Association (SGA) of Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Article 2—Purpose

The purpose of SGA is: 1) to provide a form of representational government where community is fostered; 2) to serve as a liaison to/with the larger university community, this includes providing representatives to serve on VDS and University committees; 3) to be an advocate for student concerns to the administration and larger university; and 4) to allocate the annual student activity budget.

Article 3—Membership

- 1. All Divinity School students are regular members (as distinguished from elected, voting members) of the SGA and possess their accorded rights. These rights shall be guaranteed by the individuals chosen to represent them on the Cabinet and/or the Council of the SGA.
- 2. Elected membership in the SGA Cabinet and Council is open to all full-time and part-time students, regardless of race, sex, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or military service.
- 3. Each student member of the SGA Cabinet and Council must be enrolled in at least one class per semester s/he is a member. Members must be in good standing within the school.
- 4. The ex-officio member of SGA shall be the Assistant Dean for Student Life or their representative from the Student Life Team.

Article 4—SGA Cabinet and Board Members

1. **Voting.** All members of the Cabinet and the Council shall be voting members. However, Council members will abstain from votes pertaining to the organization they represent, and the Graduate Department of Religion and Religion and the Arts and Contemporary Culture representative will abstain from all budgetary votes.

- 2. **Composition of Cabinet.** The cabinet shall consist of:

A. One (1) President,

- B. One (1) Vice President,
- C. One (1) Secretary,
- D. One (1) Treasurer,
- E. Two (2) Community Co-Chairs
- F. Two (2) First-Year Representatives
- E. Second Career Student Representative

● **3. Definitions of Cabinet Positions.**

A. **President.** The President shall (1) Assemble the agenda for and chair SGA Council and Cabinet meets; (2) Serve as contact person between SGA, the administration, and student groups (including monthly meetings with the Dean(s)); (3) Serve on one of the VDS committees where appropriate; (4) Ensure that Divinity School representation on VDS and University committees occurs; and (5) Appoint ad-hoc committees as needed to address specific issues. Stipend will be paid for this position equally the total amount of a parking permit for one academic year.

B. **Vice President.** The Vice President shall (1) Coordinate and oversee election process to ensure efficiency and fairness; (2) Assemble agenda for and chair SGA Council and Cabinet meetings in the event the President cannot be present; (3) Work with students and administration throughout the process of creating new student organizations (including monthly meetings with the Dean(s)); and (4) Serve on one of the VDS committees where appropriate. Stipend will be paid for this position equally the total amount of a parking permit for one academic year.

C. **Secretary.** The Secretary shall (1) Take minutes of Student Government Meetings; (2) Post minutes and distribute copies to SGA Cabinet and Council members; (3) Publicize SGA meetings and communicate to the Divinity School community the issues and events of the SGA meetings; (4) Maintain archives which include, but is not limited to, these bylaws, SGA Cabinet meetings minutes, records of events, etc; (5) Serve on one of the VDS committees where appropriate; and (6) Partner with the Keeper of the House to maintain the Common Room (including events white board) and coordinate organizations' use of refrigerator space.

D. **Treasurer.** The Treasurer shall (1) Facilitate adoption of budget for student groups for each academic year; (2) Approve all reimbursement or advance check requests from student groups or SGA members; (3) Maintain records of SGA budget and student group budget requests; (4) Create and maintain relationship with Divinity Financial Director, including meeting with them monthly; (5) Submit semesterly (as many times as requested or deemed by Treasurer) expenditure reports to student groups and SGA; and (6) Serve on one of the VDS committees where appropriate.

E. **Community Co-Chairs.** These two students will work in partnership. The Co-Community Chairs shall (1) Intentionally foster community on behalf of SGA through the coordination of SGA sponsored events including but not limited to a Convocation picnic, community meals, and Gala; and (2) Collaborate with - and encourage

F. **First-Year Representatives.** First-Year Representatives must be members of the first year class (whether by transfer or enrollment). Their purpose is to foster community and to give voice to first-year's concerns within the SGA. Towards these goals First-Year Representatives shall (1) Plan, budget and carry-out two events (one per semester) designed to foster community among first-year students; (2) Bring concerns heard among first-year students to the attention of SGA for action as appropriate; and (3) Serve on SGA and University committees where appropriate.

E. **Second Career Student Representative** shall serve as the liaison to the administration and SGA for second career students. Meet with admissions and other administrators as requested to assist in recruitment and retention of second career students. Attend SGA and special committee meetings as well as plan events and activities for second career students. **Note: This is a newly created cabinet position.**

● 4. **Composition of Council.** The council shall consist of:

- A. One (1) Student Organization Representatives for each recognized Student Organization
- B. One (1) GDR student representative
- C. One (1) Representative from Religion & the Arts in Contemporary Culture (RACC), and
- D. One (1) Ex-officio representative, either the Assistant Dean for Student Life or a member of the Student Life Team

● 5. **Definitions of Board Positions.**

A. **Student Group Representative.** All recognized student organizations shall select from within their group one (1) person to be a representative to SGA. Though some students may be involved in multiple organizations, for SGA purposes they may represent only one organization at Council meetings.

B. **GDR Student Representative.** The GDR student association should select the GDR student representative. The GDR student representative shall communicate any concerns of GDR students.

C. **Religion Arts and Contemporary Culture (RACC) Representative.** The RACC representative shall be chosen by those providing leadership to the RACC program to assist in coordinating their activities with other events happening in student life.

● 6. **Length of Term of Office.** All the positions listed in Article 4 – 2 shall have a term of office of one year (generally May-May).

● 7. **VDS Committees.** The VDS committees referred to in Article 4 – 3 are the School Committees on Personnel and Policy, Community Affairs, Faculty, and Academic Affairs. The President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary shall decide among themselves who serves on which committee, where appropriate, in consultation with the administration.

● 8. **Senior Recognition Worship Service.** In consultation with the Worship Committee the SGA Cabinet shall plan this service as a part of community worship near the end of each Spring Semester.

● **1. Annual Registration.** Each organization must annually register with the University before they are eligible to receive or use SGA funds or hold any events. This process involves the steps set out by the University's Dean of Students Office and includes at minimum the submission of an organization's constitution and the signature of the faculty advisor.

● **2. Creating a New Organization.** New Organizations should first notify the SGA Cabinet of their intention to form in writing. The document will include the name of the organization, mission and purpose, programmatic scope, and proposed persons in leadership. The SGA will invite the leadership to attend an SGA Council meeting to present their proposal for consideration, which will then be voted on by the council. If approved, the organization will be given probationary status for one year. A constitution must then be drafted and faculty advisor secured so that the organization can register (Article 5-1 above) with the University. As a part of the next budget-cycle new organizations are encouraged to submit a budget to SGA for funding that is subject to the restrictions found in Article 8-8(D). After two semesters of 'probationary' status the SGA Council will vote to fully approve a new organization and lift the limitation on funding outlined in Article 8-8(D).

● **3. Constitution.** Each organization must have a constitution for registration purposes that governs the work and structure of their organization. While some latitude is necessary, it is suggested that each constitution contain sections on: Name, Mission/Purpose, Membership, Leadership/Officers (including the election process), and Finances. Organizations are encouraged to update their constitutions at least every three (3) years to reflect the changing nature of their work.

● **4. Elections.** Each organization shall hold annual elections using the process outlined in their constitution. For organizations whose membership is considered to be the entire VDS student body, the student body must be offered the opportunity to vote in an organization's elections. This can happen in two ways: 1) By announcing that elections are happening in a particular organization at a specific meeting which the community is invited to attend or 2) By placing a slate of candidates for various offices on the ballot in the spring SGA election.

● **5. Accountability.** Organizations that receive SGA funding and act in affiliation with VDS are accountable to the Vanderbilt University Student Handbook and polices specific to the Divinity School, in addition to the SGA. Please consult these resources for further details; some areas of note are outlined below.

A. **Registration for Events.** All organization events should be registered with the Assistant Dean for Student Life or their representative on the Student Life Team. This office will outline the process for this. Events taking place off-campus MUST be registered with the Dean at least one week in advance for the University to assume any liability related to an event.

B. **Alcohol Policy.** The University has a thorough alcohol policy in place that requires all organizations that wish to have alcohol at events have members of their organization trained in how to do this safely. The University Dean of Student's Office maintains a list of students who have completed alcohol training and conducts the training program. A form MUST be filed with the Dean prior to having alcohol at any organization event.

C. **Assistant Dean of Student Life or a representative of the Student Life Team.** These administrators are available to help organizations as needs arise. It is suggested that

organizations meet at least annually with them to review how their organization is functioning and to assist with future planning.

D. Commitments of the Divinity School. Each organization is accountable to strive to uphold the Commitments of VDS in their programming as best they are able.

E. Use of Divinity School Space. All organization events shall reserve space through the administration's process as a way to ensure that spaces are not double-booked and that if furniture needs to be moved or additional cleaning is required the proper organization can be notified.

- **6. Disbanding.** Organizations, which have not sponsored any programming or used any SGA funds for one academic year, may be disbanded by a vote of the SGA. Any remaining funds possessed by a disbanded organization will return to the SGA, as will any unused materials purchased with SGA funds. Disbanded organizations may return as new organizations and will be subject to the provisions found in Article 5-2.
- **7. Storage Space.** All organizations will be provided with storage and workroom space in the SGA office. With this privilege comes the responsibility for maintaining the items in an orderly fashion for the use and the benefit of the community.
- **8. Office Space.** Two offices will be available in the student office suite annually that any organization may submit an application to the SGA Cabinet to occupy. The process of selecting the organizations who will receive space is at the discretion of the SGA Cabinet but at minimum will include an annual evaluation of past use of space, the way having a space is related to the Commitments of VDS and the specific programming that having office space has facilitated. In addition one office in the student suite will be available to all organizations to reserve for meetings or their own regular 'office hours'.

Article 6—Elections

- **1. Officers.** The President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Community Co-Chairs shall be elected by the beginning of the second week of April of the academic year prior to the year they shall serve (e.g. elections will be held in the April, 2008 to elect those officers who will serve during the 2008-2009 academic year).
- **2. First-Year Representatives.** The two first-year representatives shall be elected by the end of the second full week of the fall semester.
- **3. Student Organizations, GDR and RACC Representatives.** Student Organization, GDR and RACC Representative shall join the Council as they are selected from within their respective groups. These groups are strongly encouraged to select their

representatives by the second week of the fall semester and submit the representative's name to SGA Vice

● **4. Election Process.**

A. **Election Committee.** The Vice President will chair the election committee and recruit its members. The election committee will coordinate the entire election process.

B. **Election Committee Responsibilities.**

i. **Select two ballot referees.** Ballot referees shall create, distribute, collect, and secure ballots. Ballot referees shall aid Cabinet members in counting ballots (ballots will be counted by at least two people). These positions are to be filled by SGA Cabinet members, or individuals appointed by the Cabinet, who are not candidates for office.

ii. Other student organizations whose membership is considered to be the entire student body are encouraged to also place the names of the candidates within their organizations seeking elections on the ballot for SGA Cabinet elections. This process is designed to form one uniform election that is impartial for all involved. Organization's wishing for their elections to be part of the SGA ballot are encouraged to submit their election information to the SGA Vice President at least two weeks prior to the SGA election.

● **5. Nomination Process.** At least one week prior to elections, an announcement shall be made to the student body, through at least two modes of communication that the nomination process has begun. At this time, a nomination sheets may be placed in the Common Room in addition to nominations submitted to the election committee via email. Any student eligible for a position may be nominated; students may nominate themselves. The election committee shall contact any nominated student prior to placing their name on the final ballot in order to ensure that the student will serve if elected.

A. Officers must be nominated for particular offices.

● **6. Voting.** Voting shall take place over a time period not to exceed five days.

A. **Distribution of Ballots.** The Vice-President shall distribute ballots through student mailboxes in the Commons Room.

B. **Ballot Counting.** Ballot referees and SGA Cabinet members (who are not candidates) will count ballots on the final day of voting. The person with a plurality of votes for any position shall be elected to that position.

i. **Tie.** In case of a tie, a run-off election will be held to determine the winner. The runoff will be held within one week of the election.

C. **Posting of Results.** Announcement of new SGA Cabinet and Council Members will be made the Friday following the election at Coffee Hour.

D. **Honor Code.** All ballots and voting fall under the Honor Code. The Honor Council will adjudicate any violations of the Honor Code in the election process.

- **7. Campaigning.**

A. **Duration.** Candidates may begin campaigning seven days before an election. No campaigning will be allowed the day of the election.

B. **Events.** The Cabinet and Council of SGA shall provide at least one venue for candidates to communicate their views to the entire VDS student body: a forum to be moderated by the Election Committee designee, and e-mail to be compiled by the Election Committee designee, and an informational flyer to be placed in the Common Room by the Election Committee designee. The aforementioned are all potential avenues for campaign events.

C. **Content.** Campaign content and materials should express the positive views of the candidate. The names of opponents shall not be used in campaign content and materials.

D. The Election Committee may enact additions or changes to these rules after receiving a majority approval from the SGA Council and Cabinet.

- **8. Service Award Recipients.** This special category of election happens annually in April as a way to select the recipients for the student and faculty Service Awards. The Vice-President solicits nominations from all students at least one week prior to voting, which may take place electronically or via a paper ballot. Voting should be completed by the 3rd week of April.

A. **The Service Award is:** “given to the student and faculty/staff member who best exemplifies the commitment of Vanderbilt Divinity School through their service to our community and beyond.”

Article 7—Meetings

- **1. Frequency of Meetings.** The SGA Cabinet and Council must meet together at least once per month during the academic year with a quorum (50% of voting members). The Cabinet shall meet separately at least once per month. The SGA shall hold at least one forum per semester. At least one forum will be a physical gathering and discussion on issues concerning the community. All members of the SGA are welcome at Council meetings though only Council members retain the right to vote.

- **2. Rules of Order.** The SGA shall be governed by Robert’s Rules of Order at the discretion of the SGA Cabinet. The SGA President shall give an orientation to these rules at the first meeting of the academic year or outline another acceptable rule of proceedings.

- **3. Minutes.** The SGA Secretary shall post minutes of Cabinet and Council meetings in a public place and send them via e-mail to the members of the Cabinet within a week of the recorded meeting.

Article 8—Finances

- 1. **Student Organization Budgets.** Budget request forms shall be distributed to recognized student organizations no later than the Monday of the second full week of each semester. Any non-recognized organization may request a budget from the treasurer.

- 2. **Registration of Student Organizations.** In order to be eligible for SGA funds, student organizations must register with the University in order to gain access to their own University account, which is subject to the rules of the University regulating use of funds.

- 3. **Deadline for Submission of Budgets.** Budget Request forms are due to the Treasurer by noon on the Friday of the second full week of each semester. **Budgets submitted late shall be assessed a penalty:** a ten (10) percent reduction for each day the budget is late, beginning after the hour set for submission the day budgets are due. For purposes of this penalty, Saturdays and Sundays or any other day that school is not in regular session shall not be included when calculating the number of days a budget is late.

A. **Example of penalty for late budgets:** (1) Organization A turns in its budget (for \$100) at 1pm on the day due (when the deadline is 12pm). Organization A is one day late, and loses 10% (\$10) from their requested budget. (2) Organization B turns in their budget (for \$100) at 11am on Monday. Budgets were due by 12pm on the previous Friday. Because Saturdays and Sundays do not count, Organization B is still one day late, losing 10% (\$10) of their budget. (3) Organization C turns in their budget (for \$100) at 1pm on Tuesday. Budgets were due at 12pm on the previous Friday. Organization C is 2 days late, and loses 20% of their budget (\$20).

- 4. **SGA Budget Meeting.** There will be a budget meeting during the third week of each semester during which the SGA Cabinet members will vote to approve the budget. Budgets shall be approved by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote of all attending SGA Cabinet and Council members, provided that there is a quorum present. **Student Organizations submitting a budget request must have a representative in attendance at this meeting in order to be considered for funds.**

- 5. **Equitable Budget Distribution.** To ensure that each Student Organization receives an equitable distribution of funds, the following rules shall govern the budget submission and approval process:

A. SGA, either by Cabinet vote or by delegation to the Treasurer, shall first determine the available amount of funds for Student Organizations.

B. No student organization shall request more than 20% of the available funds; if they do, their budget request will immediately be cut to a request for 20% of available funds.

C. If all budget requests can be covered by the amount of available funds, student budgets shall be submitted for consideration by the SGA Cabinet. If the total amount of budget requests exceeds the amount of available funds, after assessing current student organization budget amounts, then budgets shall be modified as set out in Article 8-5(D) below.

D. **Formula for modification of budgets if the total amount requested by Student Organizations exceeds the available amount for Student Organizations.**

i. The Treasurer shall subtract the amount of available funds from the amount of requested funds. This determines the total amount of money that must be cut from student budgets.

i. **Example:** SGA has determined that \$5000 is available for student organizations. Student organizations have requested a total of \$6000. $\$6000 - \$5000 = \$1000$.

ii. The Treasurer shall calculate the percentage each student group has requested of the total requested funds by student organizations.

i. **Example:** Student organizations have requested a total of \$6000. Organization A has requested \$3000, Organization B has requested \$2000, and Organization C has requested \$1000 (for convenience in the example, the 20% cap is disregarded). Organization A has requested 50% of the budget, Organization B has requested 33% of the budget, Organization C has requested 17% of the budget

iii. The treasurer shall reduce each organization's budget by subtracting from each budget an amount equal to the percentage requested times the total amount that must be cut from student budgets.

i. **Example:** Using conditions set forth in examples to (a) and (b), \$1000 must be cut from the budget. Organization A has requested 50% of the budget. $50\% \text{ times } \$1000 = \500 . Organization A's budget is cut by \$500, leaving them with \$2500. Organization B: $33\% \text{ times } \$1000 = \330 (rounding to nearest ten). Organization B's new budget = \$1670. Organization C: $17\% \text{ times } \$1000 = 170$. Organization C's new budget is \$830.

E. While the SGA Cabinet's budget is exempt from Article 7-5(B) due to the larger scope of the community events they are responsible for, the SGA Cabinet will submit a budget for informational purposes before the Council at the SGA Budget Meeting. The SGA Cabinet's budget is not subject to approval by the Council but must be raised as a point of discussion because the scope of SGA's planned events effect the amount of available funds to other Student Organizations. After this discussion the SGA Cabinet has the right to revise their budget so as to make more funds available to student organizations.

i. It is advised that each semester the SGA Cabinet hold some funds in reserve to fund other events that may not arise directly from a particular student organization or were not otherwise budgeted for. Those seeking to utilize these funds must submit a budget to the SGA Cabinet for consideration and approval, as funds are available.

ii. The SGA Cabinet annually will determine whether to cover the mandatory fees associated with participation of divinity students in club/intramural sports as a part of the larger University. If the decision is made to cover these costs then those participating in each sport must submit a reimbursement form with proper documentation to the SGA treasurer.

● 6. **Budget Openness:** In the interests of openness, the general SGA budget and all approved budget requests shall be posted in a public place, such as the common room or an SGA bulletin board.

● 7. **Reimbursement Request Forms.** Reimbursement request forms shall be submitted to the treasurer. Reimbursement request forms shall be signed by the treasurer, the authorized organization person, and the person submitting the request.

● 8. The SGA is entrusted by the student body to exercise stewardship of the funds they receive for allocation to student organizations. In addition to the aforementioned budgetary guidelines, **the following budgetary bylaws are to guide the allocation request process.**

A. Budget expenditures ought to take the shape of the proposals made to gain access to SGA funds. While expenditures will not and should not always exactly match, they ought to be similar. If a organization wishes to use funds for any reason or activity which differs substantially from the reason stated in the original request, they must notify the SGA Cabinet of their change of course and reason for doing so.

B. During organization reports, organizations will report on their general financial and budgetary status. If changes need to be requested by the organizations to SGA, this report is the appropriate time to do so.

C. All funds allocated to organizations by the SGA must be used for the good of the entire community. Individual students may not use organization funds for their own personal activities. This includes but is not limited to conferences and other trips. Those wishing to have travel costs subsidized must look to other sources.

D. New organizations, in the interest of fairness to established organizations, cannot ask for the maximum 20% of the budget as established organizations can. Provisional organizations and organizations in their first year of existence can ask for a maximum of 10% of the available budget. We seek to balance encouragement of new organizations with the reality of a small budget.

E. The SGA will treat denominational groups as they treat all other organizations. If denominational groups have access to denominational funds, this must be disclosed and taken into account during the allocation process.

F. The budgetary process aims to be guided by equity and fairness. Towards that end, organizations with leftover funds should spend those funds before requesting additional money from SGA. We do not discourage saving; we encourage responsible budgeting and spending. When organizations responsibly spend what they have been given and defer to other organizations when they do not, we achieve maximum usage of our limited funds for the good of the whole community.

Article 9—Referendum Items

● 1. **Any member of the SGA may propose a referendum.** A referendum will be considered by the SGA Cabinet and Council if 7 members of the SGA sign a petition in favor of the referendum or a majority of the Cabinet votes to hear the petition.

● 2. **Referendum issues must be posted in writing and presented before the SGA two weeks prior to a vote.** An all-school forum must be held one week prior to the vote. Ballots will be distributed to all VDS mailboxes (see Article 5-6 for procedures). A 2/3 vote of the SGA, in addition to a quorum of 50%, is required for passages of referendums.

Article 10—Ratification/Amendments

● 1. **This Constitution shall be ratified using the Referendum procedure:** The Constitution must be posted in writing and presented before the SGA one weeks prior to the ratification vote. An all-school forum must be held one week prior to the vote. Ballots will be distributed to all VDS mailboxes (see Article 4, Section 2b for procedures). A 2/3 vote of the SGA, in addition to a quorum of 50%, is required for passage of the Constitution. (unless an emergency presents itself, SGA President and Dean of Student Life will make that judgment)

● 2. This Constitution shall be amended by a 2/3 vote of the SGA Council and Cabinet. Proposed amendments, which can be initiated by any voting member of the SGA, must be presented in writing before the SGA two weeks in advance of an amendment vote.

RULES OF ORDER, Student Government Association

I. Facilitator

The President, or the Vice President in the President's absence, will facilitate meetings. She/he will set the agenda in consultation with the members of the SGA. A copy of this agenda will be available to all persons at the meeting, either by electronic or hard copy. VDS SGA Constitution 12

The facilitator at each meeting will ask if additional items need to be added to the agenda in recognition that new items may have surfaced.

II. Obtaining the Floor

A. SGA members shall raise their hands to notify the facilitator that they wish to speak.

B. Having obtained the floor, no person shall occupy it for more than three minutes uninterrupted.

III. Motions

A. All elected SGA members may make motions at will. The most common motions are as follows:

i. Motion to enact legislation

ii. Motion to close debate

iii. Motion to suspend debate

v. Motion for clarification

B. All motions shall be made by saying, "I move that..."

C. Before being voted upon, all motions must be accompanied by a "second".

D. As outlined in the Constitution, a simple majority is required for all motions, except in the case of Constitutional amendments, where a 2/3 vote is required.

IV. Voting

A. SGA shall use the following common modes of voting, at the discretion of the facilitator:

i. General consent

ii. Voice

iii. Secret ballot

V. Meeting Schedule

A. The SGA shall set its meeting schedule at the first of every academic year, taking into consideration the class, personal, and work schedules of all members. Changes in the meeting schedule will be made public in as many ways as possible including the Student Life Web Portal, and email, print or other communications. Where possible there will be at least two weeks notice given on any meeting changes.

B. As outlined in the Constitution, **the SGA shall meet at least once per month.**

C. The facilitator reserves the right to call special sessions of the SGA in times of dire need. As outlined in the Constitution, a quorum must be present for these meetings to be considered binding. SGA members are to be given as much advance as is possible before special session.

D. While monthly meetings are the primary forums through which SGA decisions are to be made, there are times when decisions need to be made in between meeting times. At this point email, phone, or written correspondence may be utilized, but decisions should be made via face-to-face meetings whenever possible.