

Membership Advisory

2013
December



Changes to MUNSU Bylaws

Introduction

Our Students' Union is governed by three sets of documents: the constitution, the bylaws, and the policies. The constitution is the Memorial University of Newfoundland Students' Union Act (1968), which incorporates the MUNSU Board of Directors as the official representation of undergraduate students at Memorial's St. John's campus. This Act is provincial legislation. The bylaws state the governing and operational rules of MUNSU: when and how meetings are scheduled, how the Board of Directors is structured, and how decisions are made. Our policies define the Students' Union's operations and outline official stances that the Union has adopted, such as policies on sustainability and policies on sexual harassment training.

The MUNSU Board of Directors prioritized a review of the bylaws and policies to ensure the Students' Union continues to operate with best practices and in a way that reflects the will of the membership. It is important that the bylaws are accessible to members, easily understood, and easily applied.

Process

The Bylaw Working Group was an ad hoc group created to facilitate the review of the bylaws and policies. The working group began meeting in June with representatives appointed from committees of the Students' Union. Each committee was responsible for reviewing specific sections of the bylaws and proposing changes. The committees discussed the sections and any proposed changes on a regular basis over the Summer and into the Fall.

The working group received feedback from members, current directors, and consulted with individuals with a historical knowledge of the Students' Union. Members of the Bylaw Working Group also researched specific sections and references in the bylaws to ensure that any proposed amendments reflected best practices.

Feedback from members was solicited through a variety of mediums to ensure that members were aware of the process and had the opportunity to put forward suggestions. Committee meetings, which are open to all members of the Students' Union, featured regular updates from the working group and

discussions on specific sections. Further feedback was sought through social media platforms, the MUNSU website, and two Feedback Forums organized outside of the regular MUNSU meeting schedule to facilitate membership engagement.

Highlights

Most of the changes adopted by the Board relate to consistency and formatting, as well as updating terminology to reflect the current structure of the Students' Union. However, there were significant changes made in some areas based on membership feedback, research, and consultations. These are summarized below:

Board of Directors' Committees (Section 10)

The Funding Committee was created to oversee the grants and financial awards available to members, including Individual Merit Funds and Special Project Grants. Currently, the Student Activities and Organizations and the Student Rights and Action Committees approve these awards. Housing funding under one committee will allow for greater discussion and streamlining the process.

Duties and Responsibilities of MUNSU Directors (Section 8.B)

Duties for MUNSU Directors have increased to require three (3) hours a week be spent on campaigns and initiatives of the Students' Union, with one (1) of those hours being a scheduled office hour. This number is doubled for Directors at Large. In addition to increasing the accessibility of Directors to members, it also mandates Directors to work on initiatives of the Students' Union.

Referenda (Section 7)

Criteria for calling a referendum has been clarified to allow for more accountability to membership and to reflect membership feedback, researched practices, and consultations. *Section 7.C: Referendum Voting* was added to clarify voting procedures for referenda and ensure that any decisions made through referenda reflect the entire undergraduate population.

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Resource Centres (Section 12)

Language defining a Resource Centre was clarified and a link was created between the Resource Centres Board of Directors and the MUNSU Constituency Representatives by having the Constituency Representatives sit as ex-officio members on the Board with voting rights. These links will help facilitate work on campaigns and initiatives to the benefit of students who identify with specific groups and who utilize Resource Centres.

Stipends (Section 3.G)

Honoraria for members of the Board of Directors were replaced with monthly stipends. This change reflects the increased expectations for Board members under *Section 8: Board of Directors Membership and Responsibilities* as well as a desire to have clearer processes in place for these financial allocations. Stipends are not comparable to wages; rather, they act as a small compensation to ensure that members are not deterred from running for an elected position because of financial barriers. The process and criteria for awarding stipends is outlined in the new Stipend Policy.

Voting (Section 4.C.3)

Language was added to allow the student groups represented by a specific position to nominate a non-voting representative to the MUNSU Board of Directors should the associated ward position not be filled through the election process. The purpose of this is to ensure that all perspectives are present on the Board of Directors and throughout the decision-making process. The representative would hold the seat until the next by-election or general election, at which point the seat shall be advertised as open and nominations accepted from members of the ward. The groups responsible for the nomination of such a representative are listed in detail in the bylaws.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a referendum?

A referendum is a question posed to members with a single yes/no response that has been referred to them for a direct decision where every member is eligible to vote. Referenda are the highest form of decision making in the Students' Union. There are two-ways to initiate a referendum: requesting the Board of Directors to pass a motion approving a referendum or presenting the Board of Directors with a petition containing the appropriate number of member signatures.

Why was a threshold introduced for referenda?

Prior to these changes, the criteria for holding a referendum were unclear and there was no minimum number of required votes to pass a referendum. This meant that a decision for 13,000 students could have been made by any low number of members and that decision would have been binding. Introducing a threshold, even just 10%, ensures that decisions being made for the entire undergraduate population are made by a representative group, eliminating the possibility of a few individuals making a binding decision for 13,000 members.

Why have changes been made to how the Resource Centres operate?

The Resource Centres have been operations of MUNSU for several decades, and are funded and organized through the Students' Union. The responsibility of MUNSU to operate the Resource Centres has been repeatedly acknowledged by the University and comes directly from the role of the Students' Union as the legislated representation of undergraduates at Memorial.

The language around the Resource Centres has been clarified and the membership on the Resource Centre Board of Directors expanded. This has been done in efforts to foster better connections between representatives and the Centres, and help with the development of campaigns and services relating to particular constituencies.

Why were changes made to the bylaws around reprimand and censure of directors?

The primary change to *Section 14: Reprimand, Censure, and Recall* was formatting to reorder the subsections so that reprimand was listed before censure (reflective of the order these processes would take in reality). The addition of subsection *14.D: Automatic Processes* moved bylaws previously contained in *Section 8: Board of Directors Membership and Responsibilities* to what was felt to be a more logical section.

No changes were made to the number of votes to pass any of these decisions at a meeting of the MUNSU Board of Directors. Reprimand was always decided by a simple majority and censure decided on by a two-thirds vote.

Feedback

The updated bylaws will come into effect January 1, 2014. A copy is available online at www.munsu.ca.

Any questions or comments can be directed to Candace Simms, Director of External Affairs, at external@munsu.ca or 709.864.7633.