

Letters to the Editor: Amendments to SGA constitution

Scientific Trio

by Daniel D. Ester
Collegian Columnist

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you concerning the new constitution of the Student Government Association. While the constitution has yet to be publicly posted and reviewed, I would like to voice my dissent regarding a clause which changes the status of the Multi-Cultural Council, The Panhellenic Council, Interfraternal Council, and The Student Programming Council from voting bodies to non-voting, ex-official members.

Currently, the representatives of these councils have a vote in the Student Government Association. The new constitutional amendment takes that vote away. Some argue that allowing these groups to vote makes the process of creating policy unwieldy by increasing the size of the bureaucratic presence within the body. Furthermore, they argue that by having the vote, these councils are given more power in SGA than the size of their constituency justifies. In other words, the councils are "special interests" who have more pull than they deserve.

I fear that the interest in getting rid of the councils' votes is symptomatic of the general shift to the right we have seen all over the country. I am particularly

concerned about the Multi-Cultural Council, which has under its auspices groups like NSBE, Women Today, Trigon, RASO, and others. These organizations have within their ranks under-represented groups on campus. Taking away their vote, I believe, makes it possible for SGA to eliminate these groups by denying funding for their projects. Many of these organizations attempt to open the minds of the campus community and promote diversity. If this seems like an idea that has run its course, an idea that is the product of a now-cliched era of political correctness, then please look at the Behrend community. How many people of various ethnicities do you see? Do Gays and Lesbians have a concrete presence other than signs which appear on and mysteriously disappear from campus bulletin boards? And worst of all, how many of you remember last year's male to female ratio?

I believe that the potential exists for minority groups to altogether disappear from campus activities if they do not have an advocate on SGA. I do not mean to suggest that the current Student Government is racist; I just think that it is quite possible for certain segments to be overlooked if they do not have concrete, effective

presence in the body-politic.

Therefore, I am calling upon the presidents of these councils to do their jobs and attend SGA meetings. You must understand that when you skip meetings, people begin to perceive your vote as unnecessary. When you do not attend meetings, give your reports, and vote on resolutions, your fellow members think that you don't "do" anything.

Moreover, I am calling upon SGA to make itself more accessible. Open meetings are not enough. The body must publish reports in *The Collegian* every week. Even better, why not publish the minutes? Dear Editor, if this is not possible, you must send a representative to Student Government meetings. The function of *The Collegian* is to inform. It is inconceivable that people should hear about things like this proposal through word of mouth and rumor. The repercussions of this proposal could become quite destructive, and I think it would be a shame to allow the disintegration of an attempt to produce a heterogeneous college community.

Respectfully Submitted,
Brian Kitchen
07, English

Notice the byline above, friends! No more *Guest Columnist* for me! It gives me a warm, satisfying feeling, kind of like when you get a raise and can now afford the two-ply, wonder-butt soft bathroom tissue. No more *Breaking & Entering* with the cheap one-ply!

Speaking of raises, my last raise was completely consumed by the New and Improved PSU Computer Fee. There has been a lot of hype lately about this fee, so I thought I better put my 70-dollars-worth in.

Yes, the computer fee this semester was \$70. And here's what I want to know: since everyone must pay this fee, why isn't it simply included within tuition? Is the reason so PSU can advertise as low a tuition as possible, thereby attracting more students who are unaware of this outrageous fee? It's sort of like spending the night in an expensive hotel and then discovering you are being charged an extra \$70 because you wore the fabulous terry-cloth robe after getting friendly with your date.

I tried to get out of the computer fee. I went to the business office a few years ago and explained that I had been mistakenly charged for something I did not request and do not use.

"Oh?" replied the desk lady, batting her eyelashes.

I explained that it was the computer fee, and told her I owned my own PC and never set foot into the Computer Control Center.

"Oh," replied the desk lady.

I further explained that I never log on to the PSU mega-master-server, as I use another on-line service for my email needs.

"Oh."

Pleased by her inspiring answers, I asked if I may please have my money back. I was shocked to learn she possessed within her vocabulary arsenal yet another word.

"No."

Since I am limited to a certain amount of space, I shall jump to the end of the story. I ended up with no refund, of course. Apparently, one of the Computer Control Overlords took a moment from his or her (or their) daily duties of taking bets on which printer the document will come out

of this time, and hacked into the British Secret Service mainframe. James Bond showed up at my door the next day with a blond babe on one arm and a brunette on the other and politely explained that he'd received secret orders via computer-satellite-link that he was to execute me in a swift manner unless I promised to never question another PSU policy or fee ever again for as long as I lived.

Moving right along, the first fall colloquium of Region I of the MAA (Mathematical Association of America), Allegheny Mountain Section, was hosted by Behrend College on November 7. "The Dynamics of Life: An Introduction to Mathematical Biology" was the topic, and the speakers were Behrend's Dynamic Trio Dr. Carl Panetta, Dr. Richard Bertram, and Dr. Joseph Paultet, in that order.

Dr. Antonella Cupillari, head of the Mathematics department at Behrend, and advisor to the student MAA chapter, introduced the show.

The three-way began with a brief overview of the immune system and cancer, presented by Panetta. He described the predator-prey model with Michaelis-Menten kinetics, which models the effects of cancer treatment on tumors.

Please don't leave me yet, readers! I must give credit where it is due and devote at least a small section of this column to report the colloquium!

Panetta, Assistant Professor at Behrend, received his Ph.D. in Computational and Applied Mathematics at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.

Next, Bertram spoke about signal generation in nerve cells. Neurons generate, process, and transmit information in the form of electrical impulses, and it takes a hell of a lot of math to model it all.

Bertram, new at Behrend, received his Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics at Florida State University in 1993.

The trilogy ended with Paultet and his presentation of the Coupled Toilet Model. This model reveals the truth about how excitable cells require a certain amount of impulse to enter their active state and then can not be affected until they return to rest.

Paultet, an Assistant Professor at Behrend, received his Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics from the

University of Pittsburgh in 1993. I must say this colloquium was quite good! From Cupillari's eloquent introduction right through to the Q&A session, the speakers held the audience's attention with captivating success.

As it turns out, I have each of the Doctors for a class this semester, and it was interesting to hear them speak in a non-classroom environment. They were lively, humorous, and entertaining, and their presentations were quite enjoyable. And I'm not trying to imply that their usual classroom lectures are any less interesting, mind you! Not at all!

Since this was the first lecture to involve three speakers with each speaker's material being integral to the others, I rate this colloquium with the appropriate and much-deserved: {} (that's five--I repeat FIVE--integral notations!).

And now, I must share some very sad news. The last of the Division of Science Seminar Series has been canceled.

Mr. Anthony L. Ricciardo and Mr. Brian C. Higgins, both Behrend students, were to present, "Mathematics and Cryptology." I'm not sure if their seminar involved mathematically encoded information or counting burial sites, but I was really looking forward to it!

Please help me persuade them to reschedule their seminar by completing the brief and painless survey below and then drop it into the campus mail slot.

----- (clip here) -----
POSTMASTER, PLEASE MAIL TO:

DAN ESTER
BOX# 1465
DATE: _____

Should Brian Higgins and Anthony Ricciardo reschedule their seminar?

Please check one:
 Yes, definitely!
 No, I'd rather eat my Grandmother's hemorrhoid medication.
 Yes, but only if they wear tight, shiny red pants!

----- (clip here) -----
Thanks for helping with this very important survey!

If you wish to make comments, I'd suggest you do it quickly (dde104@psu.edu) before my PSU email account becomes infected with a mysterious disease.

Dear Editor,

I am writing to inform you that I am protesting the new constitutional amendment which was proposed at last Wednesday's Student Government meeting. It is my impression that the Multi-Cultural Council, along with other campus councils, will lose its seat on the SGA budget committee.

There is a question that these groups do not "deserve" a seat on the Budget Committee because they represent "special interests." Other concerns of people who are connected with SGA include the council's wrangling over appropriating money to student organizations. This makes the budget process too long. Other complaints are that the council members do not "do anything" and do not attend SGA meetings so they should not have a seat on the Budget Committee.

I feel that just because the budget meetings drag on and on and on that the members of the Budget Committee should set a limit to how much time should be spent on debate instead of eliminating seats because the committee is becoming too unwieldy and can not work efficiently. Streamlining the budget process and setting time limits would help solve the problem also.

The problem that members do not "do anything" or are lax in attending SGA meetings should be addressed by the rule that any member who has more than two unexcused absences at a SGA meeting loses his or her seat on SGA.

As far as councils being "special interests," I agree. What makes that a problem? Everyone who sits on SGA has a "special interest." SGA Senators are elected by the general student population. I believe that approximately 200 students in a total student population of approximately 3400 actually voted in the last SGA election for the SGA Senators. This number is low enough (in my opinion) to consider SGA Senators as members of SGA who represent "special interests!"

The SGA "special interests" are trying to impose their will on the rest of the members of SGA. By doing this, these "special interests" are advocating the unequal distribution of power in the SGA and the councils will be the losers in this bid for power. This should not be permitted.

I belong to a student organization which is a member of MCC. I feel that MCC looks out for its members' welfare and tries to do as good a job as it can to represent members. MCC is composed of eight organizations which are under represented on campus. These organizations are composed of students who are considered minorities. I feel that MCC is aware of its members' concerns. I do not believe that the representatives on SGA know or care about the problems that concern the MCC umbrella organizations.

I am worried about the lack of communication between SGA and the general student body. I found out about the proposed amendment to SGA's constitution by word of

mouth. I read *The Collegian* every week and I did not notice any mention of this proposed amendment in its pages. SGA should make an effort to publicize these proposed changes. I have not noticed any notices posted on campus which notify students of the proposed change either. This lack of communication should be addressed by SGA immediately.

I also heard a rumor that removing the councils from the Budget Committee is not good enough for some members of SGA. These members will not stop until they try to take away the council's voting rights by introducing another proposed amendment to the Constitution.

I agree with the complaint that other groups on campus do not have representation in a council. I am not aware of any rule which prohibits other groups with related interests from forming a council to represent their interests. Why not form a Humanities Council, a Science Council, or a Religious Affairs Council? That is a reasonable path to take rather than to try to destroy a council which already exists.

I apologize if there are any inaccuracies in this letter; I have been hampered by lack of information and a preponderance of rumors. I would like to receive a reply from the SGA to clear up any misconceptions I may hold about SGA's behavior.

Sincerely,
Colleen Fromknecht
Semester 06, History



SGA reforms defended

by John Rossomando
Collegian Columnist

Currently SGA is in the process of rewriting its Constitution. So we are engaged in a Philadelphia experiment of sorts. SGA is considering several reforms that would streamline how SGA operates. As a Senator I believe that it is my duty to inform my constituents concerning what we are now doing.

Under the old Constitution, Councils such as the Joint Residence Council, Multi-Cultural Council, Student Programming Council, The Commuter Council, IFC, and Panhellenic Council wielded much of the power in SGA. Each Council has had a vote on SGA, and in my experience has been able to block any initiative that would change the current system.

One major concern of mine is how these Councils have been able to extract the bulk of SGA funding during the Student Organizational Budgeting process. The ability for

these groups to vote on and influence the budgeting process has given them an unfair advantage for allocations. Several Senators including myself have introduced reforms that essentially limit or end the ability of any Council or student organization to influence the budgeting process.

The Councils maintain that they should retain full voting powers on SGA because they represent certain key groups on this campus. Yet, if we consider this argument then, it is easy to conclude that not all groups on this campus are represented on SGA. For example, the religious organizations on campus constitute almost 100 students and yet they have no council of their own, nor do honors students, engineering students, science students, business students, humanities students, or even *The Collegian*. If we are to understand that the Multi-Cultural Council and the Greek Councils should have votes on account of their particular interests, so should every other identifiable group on

campus. We must have checks and balances so that no one group of students on this campus can prevail.

I suggest that the Councils elect permanent delegates to SGA who would then have the right to vote in committees and on certain procedural matters in the general SGA meetings. This would then allow the Councils to voice their opinions to SGA, but would limit their power to obstruct or control the business of SGA. While it is true that the Councils represent certain particular interests that the Senators do not, it is also true that these Councils are special interest groups. To give them full voting rights is akin to giving the Christian Coalition or ACLU voting rights in Congress or in the General Assembly. The SGA Senators are the sole elected representatives of the students of Behrend, and each Senator equally represents all groups that exist on campus. We were elected by you the Students of Behrend to be your

representatives. The Councils were not.

We as Senators represent every minority and majority student as well as students from every single division on this campus. SGA has not always been very responsible to the student body so students have come to regard SGA as irrelevant.

This has to change and one way of accomplishing this is to establish town meetings where students can voice their concerns to the full Senate.

It is contrary to the principles of democracy that any group should be more equal than any other. The granting of voting rights to the existing Councils amounts to granting certain groups on campus rights that are not shared by most other groups. I am confident that the rights and views of all on campus will be represented in SGA, not just those of a small elite group of students.

