End-of-Term Official Statement

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In this report I summarise and evaluate the performance of the outgoing Student Council, which served from Feb 19 to Sep 9 2016, and suggest considerations for the newly elected Council.

Given its short term, this Council set modest goals for our term:

1. Model the way for operating on the second student Constitution
2. Deepen relationships with College leadership and administration for student input to figure more comprehensively on school policy
3. Bring the community together to choose a school mascot
4. In addition to fulfilling our various duties as outlined in the Constitution, including addressing student feedback and concern

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Projects and Concerns

1. Mascot Choice Selection: As the previous mascot choice of the East West Dragon was not ratified by the student body, the Council began a second round of mascot selection.

    a. A **significant proportion of the community was engaged** in the process. There were 54 mascot choices nominated by faculty, staff and students. In the first round with 104 voters, the Clouded Leopard, Kingfisher and Whale emerged as the top 3 choices. In the second round with 107 voters, the Kingfisher emerged as the top choice. 336 students (69% of the student population) participated in ratification[1], and the Kingfisher gained 77.8% share of the yes and no votes.

    b. **Faculty and staff** were invited to participate in nominating choices and voting online, so the mascot choice would better reflect the choice of the College community as a whole.

    c. The Council provided more **platforms for discussion** on the mascot, such as an online forum[2], and a public in-person forum[3] after the options were narrowed down to three. This was to ensure sufficient public debate on the mascot choices before students voted for its ratification.

    d. Arguably, after going through rounds of voting and ratification, some students may have ratified the Kingfisher so the school could have a mascot, even if they did not personally identify with it.

    e. Nevertheless, the mascot is likely to be a **symbol of Yale-NUS that will grow** in familiarity and positive associations over time, as it is used more widely in College events and communications. The next Council can actively promote use of the Kingfisher mascot to increase its resonance.

    f. The Public Affairs office is currently **finalising mascot designs** (logos and merchandise) with an external agency, and will work with the Student Council to get student input later this semester.

2. Latin Honours Classification: The College administration announced for the first time its policy on honours classification on Mar 24 in an email from Registry. In summary, it will be a Latin honours system with no more than 35% of each class receiving a Latin honour

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[1] http://studentgov.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/2016/04/10/weekly-update-week-12-kingfisher-ratified-elections-committee-applications-still-open/

[2] http://www.tricider.com/brainstorming/34eKqsdQptJ

[3] http://studentgov.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/63/2016/03/Minutes_Mascot-Debate_23Mar16.pdf

classification. No explanation for the policy was provided, and student feedback was largely negative towards the policy.

   a. Students were asked to **voice their concerns** or support for the policy, and potential alternatives preferred, in an online survey from the Council which garnered 22 responses.

   b. The Council reached out to Executive Vice President (Academic Affairs) Tan Tai Yong on Mar 26 for a **meeting to get student feedback addressed and clarify the rationale** for the policy. On Mar 31, Council representatives met with EVP Tan and other administrators.

   c. Transcribed minutes[4] were uploaded for the rest of the student body.

   d. While **student concerns were listened to and some concerns addressed**, the administration **stood by their decision**, which had been approved by the Governing Board. In addition, they said they did not see student input as having a role in formulating the policy, much like how "faculty do not determine their salaries".

   e. With the Council's input, student concerns and queries were further addressed in an **FAQ document and a President's Town Hall** on Academic Affairs on Apr 12.

   f. In this case, the Council was only able to have student concerns heard **after** the policy had been implemented. Its **impact was limited to improving the communication of the policy** and having it further clarified and explained.

3. Ambassador Chan Forum: In January, Yale-NUS Governing Board member Ambassador Chan Heng Chee spoke at the United Nations on Singapore's human rights record and position on gay rights and Section 377A. Her comments generated significant discussion in the student body, after it was highlighted in an Octant opinion column[5], which included a suggestion that Ambassador Chan be asked to relinquish her position on the Board.

   a. **Student opinion on the issue was divided but intense**, with disagreements on whether Ambassador Chan's comments, and the suggestion that she leave the Governing Board (a minority opinion) were justified.

   b. The G Spot approached the Council, as the student representative body, to **co-organise an event where students could dialogue with Ambassador Chan**. Ambassador Chan also conveyed her interest in a dialogue.

   c. A closed-door dialogue and dinner was held on Mar 31, which was **well-attended** by students and staff.

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[4] http://studentgov.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/63/2016/04/Minutes-of-Meeting-with-Admin-on-Latin-Honours.pdf
[5] http://theoctant.org/edition/issue/uncategorized/on-the-yale-nus-governing-board-tolerance-is-not-enough/

4. Science Common Curriculum Faculty Committee Report: Following the Common Curriculum Review in end 2015, a faculty committee to redesign the Science Common Curriculum was set up.

   a. The Council, after consultation with a faculty member, decided to **consolidate targeted student feedback** as input for the redesigned curriculum.

   b. We held **four focus group discussions** over lunches on Mar 21-24. A total of 29 students discussed a redesigned science common curriculum, course objectives and strengths and weaknesses of past courses (SI, QR, FOS, IS).

   c. Student **opinion was varied**, especially between Science and non-Science majors, and the focus group format was able to bring these perspectives in direct productive conflict.

   d. Discussions were summarised in a **memo[6] sent to the faculty committee**, and two representatives joined a committee meeting to explain student feedback. The redesign of the Science Common Curriculum is ongoing.

5. CIPE Survey and Report

   a. The Council initiated a survey on Mar 28 regarding satisfaction with CIPE, in response to several ad-hoc feedback, to get a comprehensive and representative sample of student concerns.

   b. The **online survey focused on satisfaction** with program offerings, application timelines, communication, selection procedures, and financial aid and scholarship disbursement. It garnered **40 responses in a week**.

   c. A large amount of feedback was received and synthesising that feedback took **longer than ideal**. As Council work was suspended for Reading Week and for the summer, the report was completed only in August 2016.

   d. As such, the report will be **handed over to the next Council**, who should consider meeting with the Dean of CIPE to discuss student feedback, clarify unclear policies and suggest ways CIPE can better support students.

6. Need-based Stipend: Working with the Financial Aid Office and the Dean of Students, the Council arranged for need-based stipends for future Council members.

   a. This would be for Council members of **financial need**, who may be forgoing paid work to serve on the Council. It is intended to encourage those who may want to serve on the Council but are **deterred by the loss of potential income** due to the time commitment of Council work, and in line with the principle of **anti-discrimination for representation** in the Student Council.

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[6] http://studentgov.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/2016/04/17/memo-on-science-common-curriculum-feedback/

      b.   A total sum of S$2500, for up to 5 Council members each receiving S$500, was included in the **budget** submitted to the DoS office.

      c.   Further details on the need-based stipend policy here[7].

      d.   In the policy, nominees for Council elections can directly apply for the stipend with the Financial Aid office, prior to declaring candidacy. Unfortunately, this policy was not launched for the newly elected Council as implementation details have **not been fully firmed up, nor written into the Constitution.**

      e.   It is thus up to the Council to further implement this policy for the next round of elections at the end of their term, if they decide to.

7.   Elections: An Election Committee of seven public arbitrators, led by two Council members, oversaw elections for the newly elected Council.

      a.   This was the third Student Government elections in Yale-NUS. Compared to the second elections, there were **more candidates** — 18 compared to 14. A large **majority of candidates were first-years**, with only one senior running. The next Council can consider adjusting the Council term to begin in Semester 2, if this increases **participation** from upperclass students.

      b.   **Voter turnout was moderate**, with 64% of students voting in the general elections, and 60% voting in the presidential elections.

      c.   Voting was **not limited to voting booths** in this election, and students were able to access CANVAS to vote on their personal computers. This did not significantly affect voter turnout, but reduced manpower needs and made it easier for those on study abroad to vote.

      d.   The timeline for the elections, as outlined in the Constitution, was adhered to with **no extensions**. **Voting for Presidential elections was delayed** by a day due to miscommunication and subsequently shortened by nine hours.

Outstanding Concerns

This Council was not able to address all the feedback and concerns students raised — because of timing, manpower or a lack of cooperation from staff. Below is a list of outstanding concerns that the newly elected Council should consider furthering.

1.   Expanding health insurance coverage affordably (Student Services)
2.   Policies for students with disabilities (DoS)
3.   Policies for students with mental health issues (DoS)
4.   A community conversation on security on campus

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[7] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MQGWxEEHrqmdhasppQM9-obizY5BEnig-tcjHKqZ8pc/edit?usp=sharing

5. Low Internet bandwidth under the NUS IT Access Policy (ERT Office)
6. Clear grading standards within modules (DoF)
7. Participation in the Institute-Varsity-Polytechnic Games (DoS Athletics)

Relationship with Student Body

The trust and participation of the student body is necessary for the Council to be representative and effective. While feedback collection was generally effective in this Council's term, more can be done to engage the student body and cement the relevance of the Council relative to other groups.

1. Feedback collection was done through various channels.
   a. **General online feedback form** continued to be an important source of feedback, especially on serious policy issues that were less time-sensitive.
   b. **Online surveys** were the mode of choice to collect a wide range of student input when an issue of significant student concern arose.
   c. **Standing committees** for each portfolio are intended to serve as a source of feedback and a soundboard for ad-hoc feedback received, to check if feedback was representative. Unfortunately, given the limited time period, this was **not used regularly**.
   d. **Office hours** were held weekly by directors in the dining halls, with each director having a specific time when students could approach them with feedback. This was **largely unsuccessful**, perhaps due to a lack of sufficient publicity beyond a Facebook post at the start of the week. The next Council can consider making this more physically visible and not specific to a directorship.
2. Engagement: Beyond providing feedback, students should be **engaged to support the Council's** work through **committees**. They can help to synthesise student feedback, develop solutions and serve as public arbitrators.
   a. This increases **civic participation** and involvement, and is ideal for students who may not want to commit to being a Council member, but still want to contribute in a smaller capacity or in a specific focus area. Unfortunately, this was **not sufficiently done in this Council,** as projects tended to be time-sensitive and developing relationships with students took time.
3. Communication: This Council's communication strategy was focused on an image of professionalism and effectiveness.
   a. Weekly updates on the Council's projects were provided online and through a mailing list, in a more **accessible** format than minutes. This was important as students can stay informed and assess the Council's **performance**.

b. Most of publicity beyond the mailing list and website were centred on Facebook and lift posters, which may have **limited reach given the oversaturation** of these platforms. The next Council can consider using more creative strategies, in particular physical events, to reach out to students.

c. Using particular **members of the Council who have received a strong mandate from students to drive publicity** appeared to be more effective. That said, the image of the Council and individual directors can and should be built over time with a longer term.

4. Relevance: The role and relevance of the Student Government should not be taken for granted, and the Council must work to stay relevant as an effective representative body for student interests.

a. **Legitimacy can and must be earned through performance**. Students must see that their interests are addressed, and feedback and participation in the Council's work deliver results. The outgoing Council did not always **highlight its achievements** or follow up on the results of feedback, leading to some lack of awareness. This is something the next Council, with more manpower, can address.

b. There is a growing number of staff-appointed committees for student representation, such as the Dining Hall Committee, Dean of Faculty Advisory Group and the CIPE Student Advisory Committee. The Council should work with these groups to **ensure student feedback given to the administration is representative and accountable**. These committees can be beneficial to student interests as representatives care deeply about a specific issue. However, as they are appointed by staff, their **accountability to students is not assured**. Most also do not publish minutes of meetings, so students **cannot be sure of how they process feedback** and if they are representative of student concerns.

i. The newly elected Council can consider reaching out to student representation committees to encourage practices for transparency. In addition, some offices, such as the DoS, have begun to **select students for committees through the Student Council**, a practice that the newly elected Council should work to expand.

Relationship with Administration

1. Strong **relationships** with members in the administration are essential for student input to be considered seriously during the policy formation and refining process. This Council continued to build on relationships, with regular meetings with senior leadership and some Deans.

2. Overall, the **senior leadership has shown receptiveness** to working with the Council and **strong commitment** to considering student input on policies deemed relevant. However, **receptiveness to student feedback is uneven across staff offices**, ranging from actively engaging the Council to intransigence or a reluctance to engage.

3. Moving forward, the newly elected Council should continue to meet regularly with senior leadership and deans to ensure student input is considered in policies, especially those not yet announced. In addition, it should **establish closer ties with more staff offices** at the operational level.

4. It must continue to build an **image of credibility** with administrative staff, by **prioritising what feedback to advance, and who** to advance it with. Generally, feedback should go to the relevant staff office, and if unaddressed, then proceed to senior leadership, unless it is time-sensitive.

Experience with the Constitution

As this Council was the first to work with the newly ratified second Constitution, I will evaluate our experience working with it and note amendments made in our term.

1. The **clear division of roles** with portfolios helmed by directors made work more efficient. However, key decisions on a project would often be made by a director working together with the President and Vice-President. The rest of the Council's input was limited to less timely weekly meetings and manpower, logistics and communications support. This is **more efficient but runs the risk of projects not being as thoroughly thought-through** by the Council as a whole. The next Council, in having the manpower for deputy directors, may face less of this problem.

2. This Council found the **Speaker to be a very effective institution** to keep meetings on track, encourage thorough discussion of issues, ensure projects do not fall off the agenda and that the Council adheres to the Constitution.

3. This Council made **fourteen substantial amendments to the Constitution**. This mainly pertained to Elections such as changing the voting tabulation method, separating the presidential and vice-presidential races and designating a time for by-elections. The Judiciary was also reduced in size and its powers clarified. More details here[8].

4. The **Judiciary**, which serves to scrutinise the affairs of the Council, often supported the Council by commenting on the constitutionality of its actions. However, this Judiciary faced issues holding constitutionally mandated full monthly meetings, generating monthly

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[8] http://studentgov.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/63/2016/04/Constitutional-Amendments-Report-22-Apr-16.pdf

reports and sending a representative to all meetings of the Council. With its reduced size, the next Judiciary will hopefully be easier to manage and more effective.

Important Considerations for the Newly Elected Council

The newly elected Council has more time and more people to further the work of the Student Government. It is thus with quiet hope that this Council hands over our experiences and projects, that the newly elected Council may build on these foundations to:

1. Further **expand the scope** of Council work with more proactive projects that focus on **future concerns and intangible community-building issues** (e.g. community conversations), rather than acting mainly on feedback.
2. **Strengthen the administration's image** of a credible Student Government by continuing to build close ties, especially with offices less receptive to feedback, and exercise judgment in choosing how, when and who to advance feedback to.
3. Work with other staff-appointed **student representative committees** to ensure that student feedback channeled to the administration is **representative** of and **accountable** to students.
4. Develop **civic participation** in Yale-NUS by engaging students in the Council's work beyond providing feedback — to synthesise feedback and develop solutions
5. Improve the **image of the Student Government** so students **trust** that feedback and participation in the Council's work deliver results.

Yours Sincerely,

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