

# REPORT ON THE CONDUCT OF THE COUNCIL

by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Yale-NUS College Student Government Judiciary

## INTRODUCTION

1 This is a public report by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Yale-NUS College Student Government Judiciary (hereafter referred to as “the Judiciary”). The report reviews the Government’s current Council (“the Council”), since the start of its term in September 2016, and the Council’s conduct and adherence to the Yale-NUS College Student Government Constitution, ratified November 26, 2015 and last amended August 19, 2016 (“the Constitution”).

2 The Judiciary is an independent branch of the Government separate from the Council. As outlined in Article V of the Constitution, the main functions of the Judiciary are to scrutinise the affairs of the Council, ensure the Council’s actions are in line with the Constitution, and monitor the conduct of Council members. The Judiciary also hears cases from students against the Council, and has the power to deal out disciplinary action against Council members including impeachment.

3 Pursuant to Article V, Section 5, Clause 4 of the Constitution, which states that the Judiciary shall

*“Present public monthly reports to the student body on the conduct of the Council, with special regard for the Council’s adherence to the stipulations of the Constitution”,*

and in the spirit of upholding the ideals and principles enshrined in the Constitution’s Preamble by the Yale-NUS College student body (“students”, “student body”, or “the public”), namely,

*“...to secure for ourselves and all who come after representation, autonomy, and community, as well as to safeguard and promote the interests of the Yale-NUS College student body pursuant to the values of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness”,*

the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judiciary drafted this report for the perusal of all students.<sup>1</sup>

## SUMMARY

4 As the first full Council under the revised Constitution, the current Council under the leadership of President Saza Faradilla ’18 (“the President”) has generally been accountable, transparent, and effective (P). Nevertheless, for a Council that is relatively new in many ways, there are several areas on which it can improve in preparation for a better second half of its term. The transition from the Council of

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Articles, Sections and Clauses are to the Constitution. On in-line references, the notation “(III.2.12.a)” refers to Article III, Section 2, Clause 12, Sub-clause *a* of the Constitution. This often indicates a specific clause the Judiciary is appealing to in accessing the conduct of the Council. “(P)” indicates a reference to the Constitution’s Preamble.

former President Regina Marie Lee '18 has been generally smooth, owing in part to proper handover documents and processes and communication between the current and former presidents.

5 This document will start by acknowledging the good practices that the Judiciary has observed in the Council's term thus far, which are mostly in its adherence to most of the basic duties required especially under Articles III and IV of the Constitution. The degree of outreach effort and response time to student feedback is in keeping with the Constitution's core principles of accountability and transparency (P). It will then highlight areas that need improvement, including in its external communications, and conduct of members in relation to meetings. The purpose of the report not being to suggest recommendations but to comment mainly on the Council's conduct and adherence to the Constitution, the Judiciary will not offer specific recommendations.

6 There were no constitutional challenges or disciplinary and impeachment procedures held for the Council's term as of November 13, 2016 (V.7; VIII). The President has not called the Judiciary to review the conduct of any Government members in the same period (III.V.2.d).

## METHODS

7 Chief Justice Tee Zhuo '18, Justices Ann Chen '20, Varissara Charassangsomboon '20 and Patrick Wu '19 drafted the report. Justices Keith Tong '18, Waihuini Njoroge '20, and Jared Theodore Yeo '17 contributed notes on the conduct of the Council. The report was edited by Chief Justice Tee Zhuo '18.<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to Article V, Section 5, Clause 3, the Judiciary has the duty to

*“Scrutinise all general meetings of the Council. When the Judiciary in its totality cannot be present at such a meeting, at least one of its members shall attend the meeting.”*

8 Most of the information in this report thus comes from the Judiciary's attendance at weekly Council meetings, and during meetings of the Judiciary. Additionally, the Judiciary has also assessed the policies and conduct of Council members individually, and following the Constitution's adjuration to safeguard the public interest, to a minor extent investigated comments and observations of members of the student body. The Judiciary also called for a report from the Council, summarising the body's key undertakings since the start of its term.

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<sup>2</sup> The Judiciary did not attend the Student Government meeting of October 19, 2016. We have reviewed the minutes for that meeting and spoken to attendees with regard to the meeting's proceedings. The attendance of Judiciary members is attached as Appendix I to this report. The relevant minutes of Judiciary meetings are publicly available online at <http://studentgov.commonsvale-nus.edu.sg/judiciary/>.

## GOOD PRACTICES

9 The Council has held public and open weekly meetings as required by the Constitution (III.2.10). The Council's formation of roles and committees (III; IV) and order of role selection (including the swearing of the oaths of office) (III.4) adhered to the Constitution. The Council disclosed potential conflicts of interest upon taking office (VII.2.12).

10 The areas in which the Council is doing well are in meeting basic requirements in the execution of its main duties as outlined in Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution. In terms of communication, the Judiciary notes the existence of multiple channels of external communication, outreach and willingness to receive feedback. Response to feedback from the student body has been swift (III.2.7), and there are consistent communication efforts to engage and update students, including (but not limited to) a) weekly update posters in the lifts, b) office hours in the dining halls, c) surveys, d) social media, and e) the official website. While student response can be at times limited, the Judiciary opines that the burden of public engagement has been sufficiently met on the side of the Council.

11 The President and Vice President Avery Simmons '19 have largely carried out their duties in accordance with the Constitution (III.5-6).

12 Meeting procedures have largely been upheld by the Speaker Glen Koh '18 (IX.5), who has set the agenda, kept time, and ensure the orderly conduct of members in meetings (III.7.2-4). Directors and other members of the council mostly come prepared to report on their individual committee's progress in the weekly meetings (III.8).

13 The Council also notes the successful response to the Student Life Survey and related comprehensive report, which helps the Council to uphold its role in maintaining transparency and accountability, representing students, and liaising with the administration (III.2.2-4). The Council also fulfilled the duty to conduct a general assembly of the students (III.2.12.a).

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

14 There are, nonetheless, several areas in which Council could improve, mostly with regard to the issue of effectiveness and (P), and in members not comporting themselves in "a manner upholding the reputation of the Government and Yale-NUS College" in relation to weekly meetings (VII.2).

15 Official communications on social media feeds have occasionally appeared to be flippant in their tone (See Appendix II for an example; the Judiciary notes that this issue has improved over time), and more could be done to publicize them so that they reach a larger audience. Currently, the number of "likes" on each Facebook post suggests that few people are engaging or seeing them (recent posts have between 0-5 likes). Reach of the posts also seem to have fallen over time (with exceptions such as the Student Life Survey; there are about 700 students but only 481 are on the Government Facebook page as of November 12, 2016) which brings into question the effectiveness of communication channels in

engaging the public and thus remaining transparent and accountable to students. The official Government website was also slow in being updated after transition from the previous Council. For example, the “Portfolios and Projects” tab is not updated with the projects the Council is currently working on (as of November 12, 2016).

16 Attendance at weekly Council meetings is a problem. There are unexplained absences by various members of the Council. On occasion the Council or Speaker did not seem to have been made aware of these absences ahead of time, which affects the timely commencement of meetings when the Council waits for these individuals to arrive. Members are reminded that unacceptable absences from more than a third of Government meetings constitute grounds for impeachment (VIII.2.1).

17 Meetings can be run more efficiently. In particular, some members (often repeat offenders) are unpunctual, although this seems to have improved in recent meetings. The failure of members to explain their lateness also matters; taking note of these reasons will increase transparency and accountability to students. Behaviour of members during Council meetings is also of concern. Conduct is not always professional. Members sometimes leaves meeting without reason or first asking to be excused. Members also appeared distracted, frequently paying more attention to their phones or laptops than the meeting.

18 Information pertaining to the meetings of Select and Standing Committees is not publicly available. Information regarding the Committees can only be found in the minutes of full Council meetings, and in the case of the Student Life Committee, the Student Life Report. The Constitution only obligates full minutes for general meetings of the Council, and entrusts Select Committees to “publicise information about the proceedings of the committee as deemed necessary” (IV.2.7). Nevertheless, the student body should still be kept more regularly apprised of the work of individual Committees, in adherence to the principle of transparency (P; III.2.4).

## FINAL REMARKS

19 The Council has conducted itself well, especially considering their relative inexperience. The Council has generally adhered to the principles of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness enshrined in the Constitution. The Council can do more to improve in the areas set out above for the next half of its term. On behalf of the Judiciary, I hereby present this report to the students of Yale-NUS College on November 13, 2016.



**Tee Zhuo**

Chief Justice

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Yale-NUS College Student Government Judiciary

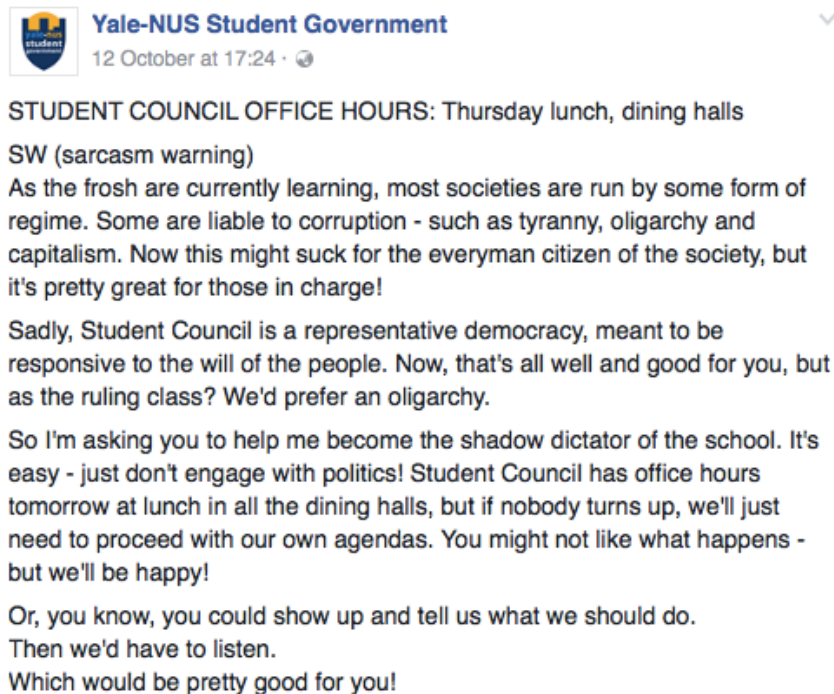
## APPENDIX I

### Attendance of Judiciary members at Council meetings

| Date of Council meeting | Judiciary member(s) in attendance          |
|-------------------------|--|
| September 14, 2016      | Keith Tong '18, Tee Zhuo '18               |
| September 28, 2016      | Waihuini Njoroge '20                       |
| October 5, 2016         | Keith Tong '18                             |
| October 12, 2016        | Varissara Charassangsomboon '20            |
| October 19, 2016        | -  |
| October 26, 2016        | Patrick Wu '19                             |
| November 2, 2016        | Jared Theodore Yeo '17, Tee Zhuo '18       |
| November 9, 2016        | Ann Chen '20, Keith Tong '18, Tee Zhuo '18 |

## APPENDIX II

### Sample of Facebook post considered to use a flippant tone



**Yale-NUS Student Government**  
12 October at 17:24 · 🌐

**STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICE HOURS: Thursday lunch, dining halls**

SW (sarcasm warning)

As the frosh are currently learning, most societies are run by some form of regime. Some are liable to corruption - such as tyranny, oligarchy and capitalism. Now this might suck for the everyman citizen of the society, but it's pretty great for those in charge!

Sadly, Student Council is a representative democracy, meant to be responsive to the will of the people. Now, that's all well and good for you, but as the ruling class? We'd prefer an oligarchy.

So I'm asking you to help me become the shadow dictator of the school. It's easy - just don't engage with politics! Student Council has office hours tomorrow at lunch in all the dining halls, but if nobody turns up, we'll just need to proceed with our own agendas. You might not like what happens - but we'll be happy!

Or, you know, you could show up and tell us what we should do.  
Then we'd have to listen.  
Which would be pretty good for you!

The example post is taken from the official Government Facebook page (retrieved November 12, 2016). It is considered flippant as it has a tone that does not inspire confidence in the sincerity of the Council to carry out its functions, and most of the post's content is tangential to the sole message of public interest, and hinders rather than aids in its effective delivery to the public (as evinced by its low "like" count of 7).