



Yale-NUS College Student Government
Election Reforms Committee

Election Reform Rationale

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On behalf of the Yale-NUS Student Government Election Reforms Committee



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I. INTRODUCTION

The following document seeks to state the proposed constitutional reforms required for the election reforms envisaged by the Yale-NUS Student Government Election Reforms Committee (henceforth “Committee”) as well as explain the rationale and logic behind these reforms. This document shall explain rationale based on individual constitutional amendments, with amendments **highlighted in green** representing additions, and those **highlighted in red** representing subtractions to and from the constitution respectively.

Broadly, the new reforms seek to replace the existing system of elections (wherein any member of the student body can run for a general seat in the Yale-NUS College Student Government (henceforth, “Government”) and then fill a Directorship) with a system that enhances competitiveness by having members of the student body run for specific Directorships instead of a general seat, and so competing with other who wish to fill the Directorships. Two new categories of Government seat have been proposed, namely **Executive seats** and **Representative seats**, to enhance the strength, effectiveness, representation, and character of Government. Further, to accommodate these new constitutional changes, comprehensive failsafes and checks-and-balances have been integrated into the proposed model.

The Committee worked on the following assumptions, as put forth by the Director of Finance:

1. **The student body’s attitude to Student Government won’t change in the near future.**

And so, this Committee must develop reforms that assume equal or lower student body participation in foreseeable elections.

2. **Given the first assumption, any proposed change in election procedure or format does not require a new structure of government, and a new structure of government in response to low student body participation is not within this committee’s work.**

And so, this committee must develop reforms which adhere to *ceteris paribus*.



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3. **Given the first and second assumptions, a new form/structure of government may only be created by the Student Council, in conjunction with the Judiciary, through constitutional reform. Only after such reform does it become the task of the Election Reform Committee to devise election procedure for any new form of government.**

And so, this committee must develop reforms for a government that can indeed be reformed (and not formed from scratch). More than being outside of this committee's jurisdiction, it is inane to reform a system that does not yet exist.

The following represents the conclusion of several weeks of debate, deliberation, and applied thought within the Committee, and the Committee wishes that it tangibly serve the student body, and benefit the functioning of all future student governments.

The Yale-NUS Student Government Elections Reform Committee

1. Anandita Sabherwal '19 (Director of Student Organisations)
2. Avery Simmons '19 (Vice-President)
3. Aditya Karkera '20 (Director of Finance)
4. Jay Lusk '18
5. Tamara Burgos Rojas '18
6. Adam Goh '17
7. ZhongXuan Khwa '20



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II. PROPOSED REFORMS

Article VI: Elections

Section 2: The Election Committee

1. The Election Committee shall hold, coordinate, and facilitate the election process of the Council and the President in a clear, fair, transparent, and efficient manner by considering and implementing parameters such as but not limited to the following:
 - a. Specific timing of nominations as stipulated in Article VI, Section 3,
 - b. Specific timing of elections as stipulated in Article VI, Section 3,
 - c. Publication and dissemination of minutes and results,
 - d. Process of elections, including reservation of physical spaces, presence of witnesses, **declaration of primary candidacy as stipulated in Article VI, Section 3,** and tabulation of online votes,
 - e. Limiting the number of consecutive terms for any student to hold the position of President to two;
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Rationale: The Election Committee shall be empowered to record primary candidacies (explained below) to ensure a systematic process of elections and election result declaration.

Section 3: Procedure

1. The Election Committee shall publicise information regarding the election process, election policies, rules, and available positions by the end of April;
2. The process to nominate candidates for election will be opened in the first week of May and closed one week prior to Election Day. Candidates are permitted to announce their candidacy and campaign within this time period;
3. **There shall exist two categories of candidature:**
 - a. **Executive seats, to be voted on by the entire student body.**
 - b. **Representative seats, to be voted on by specified constituencies.**
4. **All candidates must declare a primary candidacy—that is, their first choice of candidature.**
5. **Candidates can accept nomination to contest for a maximum of two (of which one shall be the primary candidacy) of all of the following positions available in the government:**



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- a. **Executive seats:**
 - i. **President**
 - ii. **Vice President**
 - iii. **Director of Finance**
 - iv. **Director of Student Life**
 - v. **Director of Academics**
 - vi. **Director of Student Organisations**
 - vii. **Director of External Communications**
 - viii. **Director of Athletics**
 - ix. **Director of Events**
 - x. **Director of Logistics**

 - b. **Representative seats:**
 - i. **Freshman Class Representative**
 - ii. **Sophomore Class Representative**
 - iii. **Junior Class Representative**
 - iv. **Senior Class Representative**
 - v. **Saga College Representative**
 - vi. **Elm College Representative**
 - vii. **Cendana College Representative**
6. Elections shall begin in the last week of August of every calendar year;
 7. **In the event of a vacant seat after the elections process, the newly-elected President shall appoint any member of the student body they deem fit to occupy the vacancy as stipulated in Article II, Section 4**

Rationale:

1. In an effort to enhance the competitiveness of the elections process, the Committee proposes the nullification of the present form of elections and a replacement with a form of elections wherein candidates do not run for a general seat in the Government, but for a specific office or Directorship in Government. The Committee foresees competition to arise from multiple members of the student body competing for a specific office or Directorship, as opposed to all candidates running for a general government seat and winning regardless and with no competition whatsoever.



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2. Furthermore, as candidates run for specific offices, they are expected by this Committee to make specific policy proposals and run on specific platforms. If elected by the student body, it is assumed that they are deemed to be the most qualified and competent individuals to fill their respective offices. This guards against damaging incompetence or ineffectiveness resulting from the winning candidates of uncontested elections.
3. In the interest of enhancing the size, representation, ability, and dynamics of the Government, the Committee proposes the creation of two categories of seats—*Executive seats* and *Representative seats*.
 - a. Executive seats shall be voted on by the entire student body and see pan-student-body representation as well as higher competition for votes. These seats shall serve executive functions as delineated in the Yale-NUS Student Government Constitution (henceforth, “Constitution”) below.
 - b. Representative seats shall endeavour to add a new layer of competition at the constituency level, which is expected to be more actively engaged than the student body as a whole. These seats shall serve representative functions as delineated in the Constitution below.
3. Prospective candidates may run for any Executive seat, and for their relevant Representative seats (based on Class and Residential College). Candidates may also run for both categories of seats, or two seats within one category, provided they declare one as their primary candidacy to the Election Committee.
4. Protocol concerning the handling of primary and secondary candidacies shall be delimited by the Election Committee Code, to be prepared by the Committee before the election. In a broad sense, however, an individual may assume their secondary candidacy if they win their secondary candidacy and have lost their primary candidacy.
5. The President of the Government shall be given the power to appoint members of the student body to fill vacant seats as a failsafe for the following scenarios:



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- a. Nobody runs for a specific seat.
 - b. An individual wins both their primary and secondary candidacies and picks only one of the two (as per the reformed system), leaving a vacancy.
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Section 4: Candidate Eligibility

1. All candidates must be matriculated students of Yale-NUS College;
 2. All candidates for President and Vice-President must commit to serve in the Council of the Student Government for a full term of two (2) semesters. As part of their announcement of candidacy, Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates shall pledge:
 - a. Not to accept offers for off-campus commitments lasting half a semester or longer, such as but not limited to:
 - i. study abroad programmes,
 - ii. independent research programmes,
 - iii. international fellowships,
 - iv. long-term internships,
 - b. To serve for the duration of their term with the exceptions of involuntary circumstances, including but not limited to illness, death in the family, impeachment, and other circumstances delineated in Article VIII, Section 2, Clause 1;
 3. Non-President members of the Council that are unable to serve for their term with full commitment shall resign in time for by-elections to elect replacements with the parameters as stipulated by Article VI, Section 5, Clause 2;
 4. **If the number of students standing for the Council Elections is 23 or less, each candidate will need a minimum proportion of the total votes cast in the Council Elections to be elected to the Council. Candidates not meeting the minimum vote proportion will be disqualified. The minimum vote proportion is the fraction obtained by taking the reciprocal of the number of students standing for election. For example, if 15 students stand for the Council Elections, each candidate will need to obtain at least a fifteenth of the total number of votes cast in order to be elected to Council;**
 5. There are no term limits for members of the Council, except for the President as stipulated under Article VI, Section 2, Clause 1e.
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Rationale: The nullification of the former election system makes a clause describing mandate requirements (in fractions of the total votes cast) for general Government seats redundant, and hence removable from the Constitution with no effect.

Section 5: By-elections

1. By-elections are elections in which replacement representatives are elected from the student body in the event of a vacancy in the Student Council;
2. If **necessary there are any vacant positions or Appointed Members**, by-elections will be held at the midpoint of each Council's term, in the Instructional Week 2 of Semester 2.
3. **Seats with Appointed Members, if any, must be put up for by-elections.**
3. **If the number of Council members drop below the minimum number of 10, by-elections will be held for replacement representatives from the student body within two weeks of the tenth seat being vacated.**
4. By-elections will be held and facilitated by a By-Election Committee that will be formed and shall operate with the same procedural principles of the Election Committee as stipulated in Article VI, Section 2;
5. By-elections eligibility rules:
 - a. **All non-Presidential** candidates in the by-elections are eligible if they fulfil the requirements stipulated in Article VI, Section 4,
 - b. **Only existing members of the Council are eligible Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates in the event of each position's vacancies:**
 - i. **All students may then run for the position left vacant by the member who is elected as President or Vice President.**

Article III: The Council

Section 2: Duties

The Council shall:

1. Adhere to the Constitution;
2. Serve as the primary liaison between students and faculty, administration, and external parties;
3. Represent the interests and welfare of students to the administration in all areas of student wellbeing, including but not limited to: student life, academics, student organisations, events, and budget;



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16. Elect the Speaker following the procedure outlined in Article III, Section 7;

Rationale: Given that the Speaker must now be specific office instead of one filled by someone who won a general Government seat, a new procedure has been proposed by the Committee, and the importance of fulfilling this function is reflected in this addition to the Council's constitutional duties, as specified in Article III, Section 2.

Section 3: Powers

1. The Council has the power to:
 - a. Issue formal statements and declarations on behalf of the student body;
 - b. Organise and allocate funds to major college-wide events, including but not limited to welfare events, beginning and end-of-term celebrations, and festive events when these are not otherwise organised by student organisations;
 - c. Hold closed meetings; 4 of 30
 - d. Call for the Judiciary to review the actions or conduct of a particular Council member. This is not equivalent to an Impeachment Hearing;
 - e. Form additional committees by voting on them;
 - f. Ratify the President's appointments for Directors and Deputy Directors by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote;
 - g. Ratify the President's appointments for vacancies by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote;
 - h. Confirm the validity of candidates elected by non-competitive contests by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote;
 - i. Discharge funds to committees in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order;
2. All powers of the council which require a vote of its members shall be restricted to elected members of the council

Rationale:

1. Given that the new election system will directly select individuals to fill Directorships, there is no longer a need for the President to decide which elected members of Government shall serve in which portfolio. By extension, there is no need for the Council to ratify an action which shall no longer exist.



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The Committee sees this as a move from a system where the Directors worked at the pleasure of the President based on Presidential selection, to a system where Directors, who have their own student body mandates to fulfill their office's functions and duties (just like the President), shall work alongside the President and Vice-President as autonomous officers with a separate mandate but mutual vision.

The President shall gradually indeed become constitutionally *primus inter pares*—that is, first amongst equals.

2. The Council shall, however, retain the right to ratify the President's appointments for vacancies after the election to check for favouritism or nepotism of any kind. This acts a failsafe to the election failsafe, and comprehensively secures the system from abuse.
3. Apart from Presidential appointments to solve the problem of vacancies, there still exists the problem of walkovers, or when only a single individual runs unchallenged for an office or Directorship. To check for this, the Council shall have the power to ratify the validity of someone's election to office if they were the only candidate running for that office or Directorship.

This seeks to shield the Government from potential administrative incompetence, as the Council may choose to nullify the election of an individual (who runs unchallenged) deemed unfit for office and defer to the President's power to appoint a suitable replacement instead.

Section 4: Order of Role Selection

Rationale: Given the new system, wherein offices and Directorships are filled automatically via elections, there is no requirement for Section 4, which wholly explains a redundant and untidy procedure for role selection among general Government members.



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Section 4: President

The President is the head of the Council and of the Student Government. They are the primary representative of the student body, and the chief representative of the Council to any external body, including the Yale-NUS College administration.

1. The President shall:
 1. Set the vision and overarching year-long agenda for the Council at the start of the term. The President shall consider the input of other members of the Council,
 2. Appoint members of the student body as they deem fit to occupy a vacancy in any position after the conclusion of the elections process as stipulated in Article 6, Section 3. Appoint Directors and Deputy Directors, after considering formal applications submitted by all the elected Council members expressing their preferences and qualifications. The number of Directors and Deputy Directors, and their assigned roles, are left to the discretion of the President,
 3. Appoint the seven Directors outlined in Article III, Section 8. The President's appointments will then be ratified by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of the Council,
 4. Ensure that each Director and Deputy Director fulfils their duties;
2. The President has the power to:
 1. Create Portfolios in addition to the seven listed in Article III, Section 8,
 2. Appoint additional Directors and Deputy Directors from the elected Council members, with the consent of the Council, in excess of the roles mentioned in Article III, Section 8,
 3. Rearrange Directors or remove Directors from their positions, but not from the Government, as the President sees fit. Any rearrangement will be followed by a re-ratification vote requiring a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of the Council,
 4. Call for the Judiciary to review the actions or conduct of a particular Government member. This may lead to an Impeachment Hearing,
 5. Veto a decision of the Council. The Council can override a veto with a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote, and the President cannot veto the Council's override. The President's veto can also be overridden by Student Opinion vote in the student body, as defined by Article X, Section 3. The President may not veto a Council decision not to ratify Presidential appointments,
 6. Settle matters of contentious confidentiality. See Article VII, Section 2, Clause 7,
 7. Delegate assignments to any member of the Council except for the Speaker,
 8. Delegate duties to the Representatives including, but not limited to, working closely with specific portfolios,
 9. Delegate powers to the Vice President;



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3. No Council member may remain in office as President for more than two consecutive terms.

Rationale:

1. Section 5 shall now be Section 4 within this amended Article.
2. The Presidential power to appoint Directors and Deputy Directors shall be nullified and replaced with the power to appoint members of the student body to fill vacancies, subject to Council ratification. Further, given the new categorisation of government seats, the office of Deputy Director shall be abolished (this is mentioned below as well).
3. The President shall have the power to create new Directorships as they see fit, but these shall be filled by either elections or by-elections, and the President may not fill them with ad-hoc appointments. Further, the President may not rearrange or reassign Directorships. This is in line with the new constitutional vision of making Directorships more autonomous and accountable to the mandates that elect Directors into office.

For example: The Director of Finance has a specific mandate to fulfill their duties, and so does the Director of Academics. The President may not swap their roles for neither has the other's mandate to fulfill the other's functions.

4. In order to ensure failsafe thoroughness, the President shall be able to veto any Council decision except for a Council decision that does not ratify Presidential appointments. This is in line with the prevention of favouritism and nepotism.

Section 6: Speaker

The Speaker is an impartial member who sets the agenda, convenes Council meetings, and mediates disputes between different branches of the Council and between the Council and outside parties, in concordance with the Judiciary. They are elected by the Council by a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote. The Speaker shall:

1. Relinquish the ability to vote in Council decisions, except in the case of a tie;
2. Set the agenda and arrange logistics;



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3. Consider the opinions of all the Council members when setting the agenda;
4. Convene and maintain order in all Council meetings;
5. Not be the President, Vice-President, a Director, or an appointed member.
6. Appoint a temporary Deputy Speaker when the Speaker is absent from a meeting. The Deputy Speaker cannot be the President, Vice-President or Director. In the event that the Council has no backbenchers or Deputy Directors, the Deputy Speaker can be a Director. The Deputy Speaker can change for each of the Speaker's absences if the Speaker so chooses.
7. Mediate between the President, Vice-President, and the rest of the Council, as well as between Council and Judiciary.

Rationale: To ensure accountability and a sufficient internal check and balance, as well as the coherence of the new election system, the Speaker shall be selected by the Council only from the Representative seats. All interested candidates for the office of the Speaker must first be elected into Government as a Representative seat holder.

Section 9: Deputy Directors

Rationale: Given the specific categorisation of government seats mentioned above, the office of the Deputy Director shall be abolished to prevent complications revolving around the dilution of Directorship control or reduction in election competitiveness stemming from too many seats. Hence, this entire section shall be subtracted from the Constitution.

Section 10: Limitation of Directors

Rationale: The number of Directors has already been constitutionally fixed above, and the size may be enlarged or minimised at the discretion of the President, subject to elections for the filling of new offices. This section is hence both constitutionally redundant and robs from the coherence of the new election system.

Section 8: Liaisons



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The Council shall, by a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of its members, appoint liaisons to organisations and constituent bodies of the College. Any member of the Council, with the exception of the President, Vice President, and Speaker, may be appointed as a liaison, regardless of other duties or positions. The Council shall appoint individuals to liaise with each of the following groups in the College.

1. Each Residential College;
2. Athletics;
3. Arts;
4. The Centre for International and Professional Experience;
5. Educational Resources and Technology.

Rationale:

1. Section 11 shall now be Section 8 within this amended Article.
2. With the creation of Representative seats, there is no longer a need for the Council to appoint liaisons to the Residential College Councils. The Representatives shall serve as ex-officio members of their respective Residential College Councils. This is further explained below.

Section 9: Representatives

1. The Representatives shall be the elected representatives of their respective constituencies. The Representatives shall
 - a. advocate for student interests within their respective constituencies,
 - b. liaise with the Council on issues pertaining to their respective constituencies,
 - c. serve as ex-officio members of their respective Residential College Councils.
 - d. Fulfill the duties assigned to them by the President;
2. Representatives shall contest for the following positions:
 - a. Elm College Representative
 - b. Saga College Representative
 - c. Cendana College Representative
 - d. Freshman Class Representative
 - e. Sophomore Class Representative
 - f. Junior Class Representative
 - g. Senior Class Representative



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Rationale:

1. Representatives shall exist to complement the executive functions of the Council with the vocalisation of student body concerns across Residential Colleges and Classes, representing a unique double split of the entire student body across niche concern groups.
2. Residential College Representatives are not meant to compromise the autonomy of the individual College Councils, or replace them or their function in any way; rather College Representatives shall be a channel of communication with the RC Councils.
3. This committee **strongly encourages** the College Councils to adopt their respective Representative as **full members** of the College Councils.

Section 10: Appointed Members

1. The Appointed Members shall be appointed from the student body, by the President, to any vacancy in position after the conclusion of the elections process, as stipulated in Article VI, Section 3.
2. Appointed Members shall have all duties and powers of their respective position except for duties and powers which require them to vote as a member of the Council.
3. Appointed Members must vacate their seats in the event of a by-election and their seats shall be put up for by-election, as stipulated in Article VI Section 5.

Rationale: In order to balance the necessity for all positions to be filled with the fact that Presidential appointments shall only have an indirect student body mandate (via the Council's ratification), Appointed Members, regardless of office held, shall be barred from holding a right to vote on Council decisions. This does not bar them from participating in the debates, deliberations, and drafting of such decisions, however. A vote of a Councilperson is very much an exercise of their student body mandate, and this mandate is absent for an Appointed Member.



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While a counter-argument may be made that Representatives should similarly have no voting rights in Residential College Councils, the mandate of Representatives is the same as the other sitting members of the Residential College Councils (that is, the Residential College), and so the counter-argument is defeated as Appointed Members have no mandate whatsoever.

III. FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to realise the vision of these reforms and take further steps in a direction towards a more effective and efficient Government that responsibly represents the student body, this Committee finds it prudent to make further recommendations to the Council. These are as follows:

1. This Committee **suggests** that the next elected Council should create a ***Structural Reforms Committee*** to debate on and propose reforms to the structure of Government. These reforms include, but are not limited to, legislative-executive dichotomy, the underlying philosophy of Government, the size and outreach of Government, new Directorships, and redundant offices and procedures of Government.
2. It is this Committee's conclusion that the Council must endeavour to enhance not the frequency but the quality of its interaction with the student body, to ensure that incoming classes are not driven away from Government before the elections commence.
3. As stated above, the Committee only sees the Representative seats as being seen as valuable by the student body insofar as they are empowered to effectively represent their constituencies. This should be sought through greater collaboration and integration with the Residential College Councils.