End-of-Term
Official Letter & Statement

End-of-Term Official Letter

Dear students,

It's been our pleasure to serve in the Student Government for the past year, and, as we leave office, we would like to speak one last time to the student body as Presidents.

When we were running for office last year, one of the questions which all the candidates struggled to define was: What is the role of the Student Government? And do we even need one? Through our Presidency, we have tried to cement the role of the Student Government as both mediator between the administration and students and advocates for student interests. We hope we've walked that fine line to your satisfaction. Along the way, we've realized that there is one guiding principle behind both roles: charity.

Charity is kindness and tolerance before judging others. It's assuming the best of someone, and listening to what they have to say before making any assumptions. Whether we are working with members of the administration or members of the student body, we always find it useful to assume our counterpart has good intentions. And usually, they do. Even if they don't, well…at least we tried.

We love Yale-NUS. So our hope is that you will continue to treat each other with charity. The college started small, and we grew together, welcoming new batches, saying good-bye to the seniors for the first time. As we expand, let's not lose that sense of family. Always assume the best— whether it's of your suitemate, your professor, or even that annoying person a few floors up blaring music in the middle of the night.

In addition to treating people with charity, we also hope that you continue to take ownership of the college. As members of Student Government, often our job consists in trying to elicit student feedback, trying to get people to care. We may no longer be the first pioneers of Yale-NUS, but the school is still ours. Continue to advocate for causes you care about. Take an active role in shaping the culture of the school. Be noisy if you have to. But remember to be kind, too.

We have the utmost faith in the incoming Student Government. We have faith in the student body to continue to make Yale-NUS a place of welcome and of excellence. We'll miss serving you all.

And to be honest, we'll miss being called "Madame Presidents."

Wishing you a challenging and exciting year,

Love,
Saza and Avery

End-of-Term Official Statement

In this report, we summarise and evaluate the performance of the outgoing Student Council, which served from Sep 10 2016 to Sep 4 2017, and suggest considerations for the newly elected Council.

We released our Vision and Statements of Intent at the beginning and mid-way through our term. They are summarised below:

Our vision is to proactively and responsively care for the welfare of the student body. This means leading and serving with compassion, efficiency, and competency.

Our primary foci for the rest of our term are:
1. *Advocate on students' behalf to change specific institutional policies to improve the student experience at Yale-NUS College (see list of projects below)*
2. *Act as an effective liaisons between the student body and the senior administration, Student Advisory Committees, various offices and key personnel in Yale-NUS;*
3. *Advocate for and facilitate increased transparency and student involvement in the formation of Yale-NUS policies;*
4. *Increase the student council's visibility in the eyes of the student body by improving communication channels, feedback loops and response time;*
5. *Increase transparency and accountability within the student council to ensure that projects are running efficiently*

While we will be ready to assist in the resolution of issues as they arise, we will also be proactively working on several projects under the various portfolios:
1. *Finalize and actualise the mascot in time for senior class graduation;*
2. *Assist the different offices such as Infrastructure and Security in setting up more effective communication channels;*
3. *Work with the Dean Of Students (DOS) and the Dining Hall Committee to diversify meal plan options, including extending meal plans to include Cafe Agora, for students and faculty.*
4. *Continue to work together with Aloe, PS We Care, and DOS to improve mental health policies and structures;*
5. *Create YNCyclopedia, an online platform to store academic resources, Yale-NUS histories and archives, and other information necessary to Yale-NUS College life*
6. *Increase accessibility of the regular information we publish by making media more readable and appealing to the student body;*

7. *Release a survey on Academics and address the relationship between CIPE and the student body as well as grading issues with Dean of Faculty (DOF);*
8. *Increase storage space available to students, including over-the-summer storage, arts storage, and other student organizations;*
9. *Edit and gather student feedback on the Yale-NUS Honour Code and have it ratified;*
10. *Follow up with DOS on improving health insurance and increasing students' knowledge of their healthcare options, including healthcare that relates to sexual and women's health;*
11. *Initiate and pass Constitutional Election Reform in a transparent way, involving members of the public;*
12. *Reform the classroom booking system to make it more sustainable and user-friendly;*
13. *Find an alternative to donating meal taps which still benefits Yale-NUS staff;*
14. *Work with DOS, Instituitional Affairs and the President's Office to reform the Event Committee Policy to reflect student concerns;*
15. *Organise Inter-College Games with the other Residential College committees in UTown*
16. *Regular dialogue with student organisations*
17. *Recognition and budget approval of student organisations*
18. *Purchasing, packing and distributing of welfare packs to the entire student body*
19. *Organise a month-long Staff Appreciation*
20. *Extending gym hours*
21. *Gather feedback from students through many channels - Weekly Update emails, Office Hours in dining halls, Posters in lifts*
22. *Work with Graduation Committee*

Contents:

Performance of the Outgoing Student Council

Projects and Concerns

1. **Mascot Selection**
   a. At the end of the Second Student Council, the Kingfisher was chosen and ratified by the student body as the Yale-NUS mascot.
   b. Members of the Second Student Council continued to work with the Public Affairs office even after leaving office.
   c. The Third Student Council worked with the Public Affairs office to hold **multiple dialogue sessions** with students, receiving feedback on **two different designs for the Kingfisher.** During one of these student meetings, the name "Halcyon" emerged!
   d. The Council sent an email to all students announcing the official name and design of **Halcyon the Kingfisher**, incorporating instructions on the proper use of Halcyon on apparel and other merchandise.

2. **Events Policy Town Hall & Committee**
   a. In February 2017, the release of the **Events Policy** instigated intense student concern over what was perceived to be administrative curtailing of academic freedom. Due to unclear wording, the Events Policy, which was meant to regulate external parties using Yale-NUS facilities and extremely large-scale student or faculty events, sparked immediate student concern.
   b. At the same time, concerns over the **Graduation Committee, losing Yale-NUS's pioneer roots and identity, and a perceived decrease in student-administration communication** emerged. These issues, plus the Events Policy, led to student dissatisfaction and various protests on-campus.
   c. The Student Council immediately **met with the Dean of Students and the President of the College** to communicate these concerns. The Council collaborated with administration to reword the Events Policy in a way which clearly did not restrict student academic freedoms, and reflect the original intentions of the policy.
   d. The Council further **met with members of the Graduation Committee** to understand concerns and communicate with the Dean of Students office.
   e. Within days of the Events Policy's release, the Student Council organized a **Town Hall** in the Multi-Purpose Hall, which was attended by **over 400 students, faculty, and staff.** President Lewis and Dean Bridges answered questions for over 3 hours, moderated by the Student Council.
   f. After the Town Hall, the Student Council initiated **regular student lunch meetings with members of the administration,** including the Dean of Students, President, and

Executive Vice Presidents, and managers of Infrastructure. These avenues of communication should be maintained so as to prevent a build-up of miscommunications like that relating to the Events Policy.

g. The Student Council also secured a **student representative on the Events Committee,** which decides which events may be held on Yale-NUS campus. This student, appointed by the Student Council, will participate in decisions alongside the President, Deans, Directors, and Rectors.

h. Following the Events Policy, the **Dean of Students office has deliberately sought Student Council feedback** on initiatives like the on-campus Alcohol Policy or Residential fines, incorporating Student Council feedback before releasing these changes to the greater student body. These close collaborations should be continued.

3. **Summer Storage:** Addressing student concerns over a lack of on-campus summer storage, the Student Council facilitated affordable and convenient off-campus storage for students.

a. The Student Council secured a vendor, **Spaceship,** and stayed in contact with Spaceship from **February to August 2017.**

b. The Council worked with the Dean of Students office to pay Spaceship, and **collected over $3000 in cash** from students. Many thanks to Andrew McGeehan and Petrina Loh for their consistent help.

c. Through negotiations with Spaceship, the Student Council cut the per-box monthly storage fee for students in half.

d. In total, the Summer Storage Initiative sold **300 storage boxes to 150 students. 106 students** stored their possessions with Student Council over the summer, resulting in **276 items stored.**

e. All but two items were returned safely to students in August 2017; one shelf was damaged and one box went missing.

f. Although the end result went well, the Student Council experience a **severe manpower shortage**, with the vast majority of work being done by 2-4 Council members. In future, the Student Council encourages the inclusion of Residential College Councils, Residential College Advisors (RCAs) and Dean's Fellows (DFs) to help with on-the-ground volunteer work. All three bodies were contacted, but these efforts only resulted in 3 external volunteers. As the student body expands, even more volunteers will become necessary.

g. It must be noted that **planning in advance** was crucial to this initiative. The Student Council was in negotiations with the Dean of Students office and Spaceship starting February 2017, a full three months before box pickup in April-May 2017.

h. Finally, there were problems regarding **where to store the boxes** upon their delivery in August. This year, due to a miscommunication with the Arts & Media team, storage was nearly jeopardized. The next Student Council must secure a **safe location** to store boxes for 3 days while students pick up their possessions; further, they must

secure the explicit, written permission from Infrastructure and Arts & Media, Athletics, or the body in charge of the space they are using.

    i.   **Despite these concerns**, the Summer Storage initiative was extremely popular among the student body, and promoted the Council's goal of proactively serving students in a useful, tangible manner.

4. <u>**Community Events:**</u> Halloween Haunted House, Welfare packs, Class of 2017 Award, Turn Up With Tan Tai Yong Vol. I and II

    a. **Halloween Haunted House.** The Student Council collaborated with i'Deco and the **University Town Colleges** to put on a Halloween Haunted House. **More students than anticipated attended**, leading to a very long line and crowded spaces. In future, the Haunted House should be able to facilitate more students at a time and move more quickly. The reminder texting system set up at NUS also did not function well at Yale-NUS. In the future, **planning should start earlier** and official lines of communication should be set up with NUS and any other bodies involved. Further, a set timeline should be set up and followed.

    b. **Welfare Packs.** In accordance with the Student Council's vision for a **Culture of Care**, the Council and Judiciary worked together to assemble **welfare packs for the entire student body**. Items for the packs (consisting of cup noodles, snacks, eye masks, cutomised postcards) were purchased using budget from the Student Council and Dean of Students office, and packs were delivered to each student's door.

    c. **Class of 2017 Award.** The Council worked with the President's Office to facilitate the selection of a student from the Class of 2017 who, in the eyes of their peers, was instrumental in shaping the college, contributing positively to the community over the last four years. The student received a medal and a certificate and was recognised at graduation. The Class of 2017 award is the result of a gift to the College, and will tentatively continue in the future.

    d. **Turn Up with Tan Tai Yong, Vol. I and II.** In order to introduce our new President to the greater student body, the Council collaborated with the President's Office to host two welcoming events in April and August 2017. President Tan Tai Yong was in attendance at both, served coffee at Brewhouse to students, and was able to meet members of the student body in a casual manner.

5. <u>**Mental Health on Campus**</u>

    a. From the beginning of our term in August 2016, the Student Council received various pieces of feedback on Wellness and Counselling on campus. The most pressing initial concerns were the **lack of counsellors** as well as the **locations** of their offices.

    b. The Director of Student Life met weekly with the Dean of Students to discuss ways to improve this situation. We conducted a **Student Life Survey** which asked extensive questions about student's personal mental health, the support they are receiving, as

well as feedback on institutionalised processes relating to mental health. This was then qualitatively and quantitatively compiled into a **Student Life Report**, with recommendations ranging from increasing peer-to-peer mental health support, to communicating the importance of mental health awareness to faculty, staff and administration, to providing suggestions for infrastructural movements of the Counselling Centre. This was **presented to senior administration** with parts of it taken seriously into consideration.

c. At the same time, a mental health advocacy group - Aloe, was starting and so we worked closely with them by having a student council **representative** present in the group.

d. Currently, there have been significant changes to mental health on campus, especially **clearly partitioning Wellness and Counselling**, which increases clarity and expands proactive programming efforts. There is now also an o**nline booking system**, which removes the bureaucracy needed to book appointments.

e. However, there are still crucial changes that need to happen. We recommend that the Council continues advocating for **increased amounts of attention and resources** to be focused on mental health. It is important to ensure there are sufficient **quality counselling** services on and off campus. Support for student-led mental health groups also need to be sustained.

6. **Surveys & Results - Student Life & Academics**

   a. **Student Life Survey.** The Yale-NUS Student Council aims to be an effective body for change. However, we cannot know what and how to change without input from the student body. With this in mind, we designed the Student Life survey to better understand how we can advocate for students' needs and to gather data to support our advocacy efforts.

      i. In October 2017, we administered the student life survey to collate student feedback in the areas of **dining, health insurance, on- campus employment, the development of an honour code, Wi-Fi, Student Council communication, the library, wellness, and the tuition grant.**

      ii. **362 students participated.** Responses came from a representative portion of the student body, across classes, gender, and residential college.

      iii. Issues of concern further included: the Health Insurance plan, additional lighting in the library, better Wi-Fi and on-campus connectivity and the specifics of the honour code. Wellness came up as a key area for improvement. Students also requested more information sessions about the tuition grant for international students.

      iv. The report, including Appendices, was **90 pages long** and ought to be read in its entirety. It is posted on the Yale-NUS Student Government website.

b. **Academics Survey.** The first comprehensive Academics survey conducted by the Student Government on the entire student body assessing topics such as major-related concerns, study abroad, and other internship/research opportunities.
   i. The results of this survey were compiled into a report, which is currently [posted](#) on the Yale-NUS Student Government website, and presented to Student Body and Administration.
   ii. The Academic Survey was constructed with the assistance of the administration to ensure that all the questions presented the correct picture of the programmes and policies.
   iii. The Student Council garnered a total of **244 student responses** (⅓ of the school population at the time);
   iv. 8 recommendations in total were made based on the student's responses to improve the academic life at Yale-NUS College. 5 of them pertain to the curriculum, and 3 of them to experiential learning.

7. **YNCyclopedia**
   a. The Student Council created a platform for information about Yale-NUS College, including each semester's module brief, syllabi for classes and the structure of the college.
   b. YNCylcopedia documents social events that happened on the campus, an archive of knowledge about **how certain policies came abou**t (e.g. Events Committee Policy) and the topic of conversations that were discussed among the college community.
   c. It is a virtual space where past students can **share knowledge and history of the school** with subsequent batches of students.
   d. Website can be found here: http://yncyclopedia.commons.yale-nus.edu.sg
   e. At its peak period, YNCyclopedia was accessed by **70 students.**
8. **Organising Inter-faculty games, and Inter-collegiate Games**: The Student Council organised the Inter-College Games 2017 and Inter-Faculty 2017 of which more than 2,500 students, staff and faculty in Yale-NUS and NUS participated in.
9. **Advocating for Athletics-related Improvements**
   a. The Student Council **founded the Athletics Council**, led by the Director of Athletics and is made up of Yale-NUS Athletics team captains.
   b. The Council responded to student feedback, and, in communication with Infrastructure and Athletics, **extended gym hours** during the school year.
   c. Gym privileges **were further extended to alumni** for the time being.
   d. The Student Council advocated for **improvements to gym facilities,** including a scale and upkeeping of gym equipment.
   e. **Athletic teams' budgets** were overhauled, including but not limited to having welfare budget, IFG/ICG bonus, attendance bonus, and co-payment of personal sports equipment and overseas trip.

f.   The Council further facilitated an Appreciation dinner for athletes and captains.

10. **Student Organisations Committee:** Formed a student organisation standing committee adjusted for class and RC demographics that:
   a. **Regularly reviewed proposals, constitutions, and budgets** of new student organisations. The committee recognised these organisations based on the principles of recognition that it received and reviewed from the previous student government,
   b. At the end of the academic year, the committee was in-charge of reviewing and **allocating budget requests of the 60+ student organisations** on campus. The committee decided to add a qualitative assessment to the budget review by asking organisations to send a tentative time-line of the coming year, and a reflection on the year that had passed. The committee reviewed these in conjunction with the budget to allocate funds. Members of the committee then **communicated the budget allocations to the organisations.**
   c. In carrying out its duties, the committee worked closely with Petrina Loh from the Dean of Students office and assisted in other policy conceptions like the **mandatory budget review, repercussion for budget defaulters, and policies regarding the use of student organisations room.**
   d. This year, the student organisations portfolio **initiated communication between leaders of organisations** that pertained to the same domain (e.g. performing arts, business and finance, community engagement etc.) Through such meal-time sessions, the portfolio collated feedback about the experiences and difficulties of student organisations. The aim was to open a channel of communication between the government and various student organisations,and alo start useful conversations (and hopefully meaningful collaborations) between student organisations in similar realms of functioning.
   e. The student organisations portfolio, in conjunction with DOS, drafted the policy regarding the **utilization of the student organization room**. This policy was then implemented by DOS.

11. **Constitutional Review Committee:** Responding to student feedback that Council elections were uncompetitive, the Council made significant changes to Council elections.
   a. It was brought to the Council's attention that the Student Council elections, which allocated candidates to the Council based on a **ranking system**, made it too easy to get onto the Council. In fact, all candidates who received a ranking of any kind, even the lowest ranking, were admitted to the Student Council, since candidates **merely had to be ranked by 1/# number of candidates percent of the student body.** In addition, this method of voting was not widely understood by the student body.

b. Further, there was feedback that because the Council was predominantly composed of first year students, the Council **was not representative** of the Yale-NUS student body.

c. All of these concerns **decreased the legitimacy** of the Student Council.

d. In order to increase the competitiveness of elections, as well as ensure greater representation across classes, the Constitution Review Committee decided to shift to a **first-past-the post or plurality** method of voting, where candidates would **run for a specific portfolio position** instead of running just for the Council at large. **Class representative positions** were also introduced.

e. In the case of a position going vacant, the Committee decided to **grant the President powers of appointment**. As a check on this power, appointed Council members cannot vote on legislation and have the option of being ratified by ⅔ of the Council. Further, appointed seats must be made available for electoral competition in the **mid-semester by-elections.**

12. Elections for the Fourth Student Council

a. The outgoing Presidents chaired the Elections Committee, presiding over elections which, due to Constitutional changes, were **significantly different** than the past three elections under the current Constitution (Second Student Council, Third Student Council, Third Student Council By-Elections).

b. Elections for the Fourth Student Council had visible campaigning. 14 of the 15 candidates attended the Elections Forum.

c. In total, there were **15 candidates** running for **13 positions. 457 Yale-NUS students** voted in the Fourth Student Council elections, exceeding the 50% quorum required.

d. **Two positions went unfilled** after elections due to either "No vote" winning a plurality or a student winning more than one position. These positions were quickly filled by the elected President.

e. There were no campaign violations or penalties.

f. Although there was significant student support for **all elected candidates**, many candidates who had previously accepted their nominations dropped out of the race a few days before the election, leading to many **uncontested positions.**

Ensuring Continuity

There are some issues which are left unsolved or only partially dealt with because of a lack of time, manpower or cooperation from staff. We also encourage the newly elected Council to continue some of the best practices from the outgoing Council:

1. To ensure that there is a student representative in the Events Policy Committee
2. To ensure that publicity and outreach to the entire student body continues with zeal, both online and offline
3. To organise informal meetings between students and administrators
4. To continue helping students find an affordable and sustainable solution for summer storage
5. To finalise an Honor Code
6. To continue advocating for mental health and wellness
7. To continue advocating for student input to be seriously considered in Dining decisions
8. To follow-up with the Dean of Faculty and the Centre of International and Professional Experience about the results from the Academics survey
9. To continue and to publicise YNCyclopaedia
10. To continue advocating for athletics-related improvements

Relationship with the 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 more micro issues that may affect only a proportion of the student body. Students should be encouraged to use this more widely, as its use was rather sporadic.
    b. **Online surveys** were the mode of choice to collect a wide range of student input when an issue of significant student concern arose. These need to be supplemented with offline efforts such as the distribution of cup noodles and buttery food so as to solicit more real-time responses. But most of the time, they are able to solicit responses from a representative number of the student body.
    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. This was used to varying levels of success in each Directorship.
    d. **Office hours** were held weekly during lunch at all dining halls, with 2 Council members manning each table. This is an opportunity for students to quickly and conveniently provide feedback either through the feedback form or in conversation with the Council member

2. **Engagement**: Beyond providing feedback, it is important for students to be constantly **involved** and **informed** of Council's work. This improves the **legitimacy** and displays evidence of an **action-oriented** Council.
    a. **Weekly emails** were sent to students inboxes on an opt-out basis. These were very effective at publicising the Council's activities, discussions and debates. Feedback was usually as a result of these emails.
    b. **Facebook page** was continued and used as a platform for engaging with the online community. It requires more hype amongst the student body, and must be moderated by the Director of External Communications and Presidents.
    c. **Posters in Lifts** were put up weekly to display the key actions and updates that the Council has for the student body. Council members were also displayed on these posters so as to provide a more humane view of Council, and to allow students to understand their representatives further.
3. **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. While the outgoing Council did try to highlight its achievements and follow up on the results of feedback, there can be increased efforts at publicity.

b. There are a number of staff-managed 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 managed 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 outgoing Council have been trying to engage these committees by sitting in for meetings and advocating for student's feedback that we receive. This was successful to varying degrees, depending on the receptiveness of the committees.

    ii. The outgoing Council has advocated for these committees to be **managed by the Student Council** so that student representation is not only assured but advocacy can also be sustained. The incoming Presidents should continue this conversation with senior Administration to ensure it's followed-up on.

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, Directors and 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. The best method of engaging Administration will be learnt through **trial and error**, as various institutional procedures and frameworks might be unknown to students. It is important to quickly meet formally or informally with members of Administration if there are issues with organisation or dissemination of information.
4. Moving forward, the newly elected Council should continue to meet regularly with senior leadership, Directors 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.
5. 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.

Important Considerations for the Newly Elected Council

The newly-elected Council has been elected directly into certain Directorships, so it is hoped that there would be a further mandate and commitment to these Directorships, and increase the effectiveness of the Council. 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. Continue to be **quick and receptive** to feedback and liaise with Administration as necessary.
2. Ensure **student input** is taken into consideration for administrative decisions which have large bearings on the student experience through working with student representative committees and **open dialogues** with Administration.
3. Develop **civic participation** in Yale-NUS by engaging students in the Council's work beyond providing feedback — to **synthesise feedback and develop solutions.**
4. **Solidify the image** of a Student Government that responds **effectively** to feedback so as to increase **student's trust** in the Council. Try to mitigate resignations and **ensure commitment** within the Council.
5. Build a **two-way relationship with NUS** by forming interpersonal relationships through events and meetings so as to increase the involvement of our college within our parent university