

A. Instructions

Use these guidelines to write your organization's constitution. You should also consult the *Checklist for Approval of a Constitution* and the *Sample Constitutions* available from the Office of Student Development (OSD) in UC 205 or online at www.panam.edu/dept/dos.

B. Common Questions

1. What is a constitution?

A constitution is a document that contains the governing rules of an organization and that describes the powers and duties of the group's members and officers.

2. Why do you need a constitution?

Your constitution will be a permanent document that will provide the basic rules for your organization's activities. It will bind both current and future members. Also, the University of Texas-Pan American requires you to have one; you must submit a constitution to the Committee on Student Organizations (CSO).

3. What sorts of things should your constitution contain?

Your constitution should contain everything that will allow your organization to function. Think of it as a general governing document like the United States Constitution. The U.S. Constitution has broad language and doesn't cover every specific issue needed to govern, but it is narrow enough so that any citizen can look at it and discover the broad laws that govern his behavior. Similarly, any member or potential member should be able to look at your constitution and discern how your organization works.

4. Can anyone help you write your constitution?

Yes! The OSD is available to help you write your constitution. Please ask for one of the Coordinators in UC 205 or email osd@panam.edu.

C. Elements of a Model Constitution

It is a good idea to cover the following subject areas in your constitution. (Items in **bold red** are **required** by the University.)

1. The name of your organization

a. Be concise and descriptive. Try to catch the essence and purpose of your organization in the name.

b. **The name of the UT system, this campus, or any form thereof, cannot be used as part of the name of the organization.**¹ For example, your organization cannot be called "The UT-Pan Am Pet Lovers" or "The Pan American Pet Lovers." However, you

may state that your organization is located at UT-Pan Am. For instance, the statement “Pet Lovers Society at UT-Pan Am” in your constitution would be acceptable.

2. A statement of purpose/ goals
 - a. What is the reason your organization exists?
 - b. What overarching goals does your organization want to accomplish?
3. Membership requirements
 - a. **Members must be students, faculty, or staff.**²
 - b. **You must include a non-discrimination provision stating that membership is open to everyone regardless of race, religion, color, sex, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, or sexual orientation.**³
 - c. **You must include a provision stating that the majority of your active membership must be enrolled students.**⁴
 - d. What other qualifications do you want your members to have? Use objective measures, like a certain GPA or a specific major. Try to avoid the use of subjective or vague terms. E.g., Use “Members need a GPA of 3.5 to gain entrance to this honor society.” Do not use “Members need a high GPA to gain entrance to this honor society.”
 - e. Do you want to make a distinction between active and inactive members? If so, how? Are there a certain number of meetings that an active members must attend? If someone pays their dues, is he automatically an active member?
 - f. What are the procedures for expelling a member? Should absences or bad behavior be factors? What is the procedure for appealing an expulsion? Does that procedure ensure that every member has due process and gets an opportunity to present his case? Who will be the hearing board?
4. Officer and executive board requirements
 - a. How many officers to do you want? Typical officers include: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Historian.
 - b. Describe the officers and assign duties to them.
 - c. How are officers chosen? When will they be elected? (A good time is in the spring semester.) Describe the election procedure.
 - d. What happens if an officer resigns? How is the vacancy filled?
 - e. When determining your officer duties, remember that someone must keep track of money and financial reports, someone must keep track of the membership, and someone (ideally two people) must be assigned to sign, deposit, or withdraw checks.
 - f. What is the recall procedure? What majority is required to remove officers? Is there an appeals process? Does that procedure ensure that the officer gets due process and an opportunity to present his case? Who will be the hearing board?
5. Advisors
 - a. **Your organization must have at least one advisor.**⁵
 - b. How will the advisor be chosen? Will the general membership choose or will the officers choose?
6. Meeting structure
 - a. Who will decide when meetings are called?

- b. Will there be regular meetings and special meetings? If so, describe each.
- c. When will meetings be held?
- d. What percentage of the members constitutes a quorum? (A quorum is “the number (as a majority) of officers or members of a body that when duly assembled is legally competent to transact business.” – *Webster’s*)
- e. How will your meetings be conducted? What procedure will you use for dealing with agenda items? Sometimes *Robert’s Rules of Order* are useful, but not necessary.

7. Dues

- a. Will you have dues? Dues are a fee or charge for membership.
- b. If you will have them, try to avoid stating a number.
- c. Who will set the dues amount?

8. Committees

- a. Do you want to establish standing, or permanent, committees that will deal with particular club activities?
- b. Do you want instead to establish special, or temporary, committees that will last only a certain period of time?
- c. Do you want a mix of both?
- d. For what tasks will each committee be responsible? For example, you may want to have a committee that plans and oversees fundraisers.
- e. Will the members of the committee be appointed or elected?
- f. Will each committee have a chair?
- g. How long will each term of a committee member last?

9. Elections

- a. Who calls them?
- b. When are they held?
- c. How many votes are necessary to pass items in a vote?
- d. **Only enrolled students may vote and hold office.**⁶

10. Method to amend the constitution.

- a. What kind of procedure do you want to establish for amending your constitution? Adding amendments should be difficult, since it is your governing document. Will a 2/3 or 3/4 vote be needed?
- b. **Any amendment proposed by the organization must be approved by the CSO.**⁷

D. Format for Corrections to a Constitution

If your organization already has a constitution on file with the Office of Student Development but wants to make changes or corrections, those changes or corrections should be noted on a revised copy of the constitution as follows:

- 1. Any additions to the text should be italicized;
- 2. Any deletions to text should be stricken with a line.

For example, suppose a section of your constitution reads as follows:

Article III. Membership

§1. Open Membership Provision

- a. Membership is open to students, faculty, and staff of the University of Texas-Pan American regardless of race, national origin, political affiliation, sex, creed or religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, veteran's status, or weight.
- b. Members are encouraged to be fans of Radiohead, but are not required to be.

§2. Founders

Founders are those first ten students who submit the paperwork to the Office of Student Development necessary to establish The Radiohead Society as a temporary organization.

§3. Active/ Inactive Members

- a. Active Members.

A corrected version of this section would be presented to the CSO like this:

~~Article III. Membership~~

Article III. Membership Requirements

§1. Open Membership Provision

- a. Membership is open to students, faculty, and staff of the University of Texas-Pan American regardless of race, national origin, political affiliation, sex, creed or religion, age, disability, sexual orientation; ~~veteran's status, or weight.~~ *or veteran's status.*
- b. Members are encouraged to be fans of Radiohead, but are not required to be.

~~§2. Founders~~

~~Founders are those first ten students who submit the paperwork to the Office of Student Development necessary to establish The Radiohead Society as a temporary organization.~~

~~§3. Active/ Inactive Members~~

- ~~a. Active Members~~

§2. Active Members

- a. All person who attend at least two consecutive meetings will be active members.
- b. All others will be inactive members.

E. FYI

For more information about University requirements for student organizations please see:

HOP, 5.6.1 – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations

On-line at <http://www.panam.edu/newhop/files/pdf/G4671189.pdf>

HOP, 5.6.2 – Policy on Student Organizations and Facility Use

On-line at <http://www.panam.edu/hop/files/pdf/Y4522935.pdf>

HOP 3.6.5.D – Specific Campus Life Committees

On-line at <http://www.panam.edu/hop/files/pdf/P3676482.pdf>

NOTES

¹ “A registered student organization may state that its membership is composed of students, or of students, faculty, and/or staff, of the University, but it shall not suggest or imply that it is acting with the authority or as an agency of the University. A student organization shall not use the name of the University or the name of The University of Texas System as a part of the name of the organization, and it shall neither display the seal of either the University or The University of Texas System in connection with any activity of the organization nor use such seal or seals as a part of any letterhead, sign, banner, pamphlet, or other printed material that bears the name of the organization.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.4.a – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations; 5.6.2.C.1 – Policy on Student Organizations and Facility Use)

² “No registered student organization or group may have any person as a member who is not either a student or a member of the faculty or staff of the University.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.4.b – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations)

³ “The University of Texas-Pan American is committed to providing equal opportunity to all persons seeking employment, or access to its programs, facilities, or services without regard to race, religion, color, sex, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, or sexual orientation.” (HOP 2.2.1.C – Non Discrimination Policy)

⁴ “A majority of the total active membership of the student organization must be enrolled students.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.4.d – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations)

⁵ “Every student organization must have at least one advisor who shall be a full-time faculty member, full-time administrator, or full-time staff member at the University.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.2 – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations)

⁶ “Only enrolled students may vote and hold office.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.4.d – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations)

⁷ “Any amendments to a statement of purpose or amendments to the constitution of a student organization are subject to review and approval by the Committee on Student Organizations.” (HOP 5.6.1.B.3 – Recognition and Approval of Student Organizations)