




University-wide Student Group Handbook

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

Student groups at Harvard provide valuable educational and social opportunities for students and give them the opportunity to form connections around common academic, cultural, political, and social interests. Student groups can also contribute to the overall intellectual and social life of the University and can enrich the opportunities and experience of Harvard students, faculty, and staff, by offering programming and events that are consistent with the University's teaching and research mission.

There is a strong presumption that student groups typically belong in a particular Faculty, where local expertise best aligns with a group's mission. However, Harvard authorizes a small number of student groups to operate as University-wide student groups, or, University Student Groups (USGs). A limited number of University Student Groups are selected or renewed each fall and spring via a competitive application process. Groups with prior approval must re-apply for recognition each year during the term they were first recognized and are not guaranteed renewal. This *Handbook* outlines the requirements and processes that must be followed for student groups to obtain University-wide recognition through this program, and lists policies and guidelines that approved University Student Groups must follow.

Please note that approval as a University Student Group does not denote any funding commitment on the part of Central Administration, nor does it guarantee access to resources such as physical space, student affairs staff, or marketing and promotions. Student groups and their officers and members must still seek many resources locally and must abide by the policies of the Harvard Schools. University Student Groups should recognize that the individual Schools may not necessarily provide the same privileges and resources (space, funding, advising, etc.) to USGs as they do to School-based groups, and that Harvard may withhold or revoke a group's recognition if the group's activities are in conflict with the University's teaching and research mission or activities.

In some cases, groups may aspire to a consortium model, wherein a University Student Group is made up primarily of multiple School-based organizations. In such cases the "umbrella" organization must meet the requirements of a USG outlined here, but the subsidiary School-based groups will continue to exist under local School-based policies and oversight.

DEFINITION

A University Student Group is defined as an actively registered group that meets the criteria and follows the policies and procedures specified in this document and remains in good standing. The typical process for recognition is outlined below.

APPROVAL AND OVERSIGHT

University Student Groups are approved by the University Student Groups Review Committee, comprised of members of the Council of Deans of Students (CODOS), the Provost's Office, and the Harvard Graduate Council (HGC).

All other authority or responsibilities of the Review Committee are described in this Handbook.

CONTACT

Questions about the information described in this *Handbook* or about University Student Groups in general can be directed to the Review Committee care of Marshall Page in the Office of the Provost (marshall_page@harvard.edu).

PRIMARY CRITERIA AND APPLICATION

University Student Groups must apply for recognition by submitting a complete Application Form by the deadline below. In general, University Student Groups must meet these criteria:

- **RATIONALE:** Priority will be given to groups that make the most compelling cases for University-wide recognition. Why is founding a School-based group (or groups) not a viable option? Or, alternatively, how does your organization co-function with related School-based organizations? How is the mission of the group University-wide? What is the benefit to the wider University community? How would/does University-wide status help with the mission of your organization?
- **MEMBERSHIP:** The group must be composed of at least 20 currently enrolled degree-seeking students from a minimum of three Harvard Schools. Membership in groups may be open to faculty, staff, alumni, and spouses or partners of currently enrolled degree-seeking students; however, all officers must be students, at least 50% of the group's membership must be made up of students, and, again, the group must maintain at least 20 student members.
- **OFFICERS:** Each group must have officers from a minimum of three different Schools. Each group must have a president, vice president or executive vice president, and a treasurer, though it may have other officers as well. Of the top three positions, at least two Schools must be represented. Only currently enrolled, degree-seeking students may be officers. Harvard College students may not serve as the president of a University-wide student group.

Priority will be given to groups with membership and officers representing the widest possible range of Schools.

- **SUPPORTING UNIT:** Each group must identify a supporting administrative unit at Harvard to serve as an administrative home, providing some limited administrative support, particularly with regard to financial transactions, annual budgeting, etc. Supporting units may be centers, departments, interfaculty initiatives (IFIs), or similar. Ordinarily, supporting units will only support one University Student Group. Schools, and Deans of Students at Schools, cannot serve as supporting units.
- **NAME:** The name of the group must include the words "Harvard" or "Harvard University" and "Student." Certain words like "Initiative" and "Center" will not be allowed in the name to avoid confusion with faculty-led efforts. The student group name must follow guidelines established by the Harvard Trademark Program, and proposed names, logos and insignia-based products for the student group must be reviewed and approved by the Trademark Program, as described in the "Use of the Harvard Name and Insignias" section of this *Handbook*.

Application Deadline

The *fall 2023 application deadline* is **Wednesday, October 19 (midnight)**, and the *spring 2024 cycle deadline* is **TBD**. Applications must be submitted via email (with attachments, including scanned signature pages) to Marshall Page (marshall_page@harvard.edu). There are a limited number of spots available each year.

ANNUAL RENEWAL

Groups seeking to remain active with official recognition must re-apply each year. Applications for renewal must include:

1. A full application;
2. Budgets for both the previous and current (projected) fiscal years (July 1 – June 30), signed by the supporting unit and showing all significant expenses and sources of income;
3. A list of all constitutional amendments adopted during the past fiscal year.

Organizations that fail to submit an application for renewal will be considered inactive.

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

In order to remain in good standing, all University Student Groups must comply with [University Policies and Guidelines](#).

CONSTITUTION

All University Student Groups must have a constitution. The following items must be included in the constitution:

1. **NAME AND MISSION:** The constitution must reference the full name of the organization and must be edited to reflect any changes ultimately imposed by the Trademark Program. The mission should state the objectives and goals of the organization, and should include a brief description of the contribution the group will make to the Harvard community.
2. **MEMBERSHIP:** The constitution should describe criteria for membership in the group. It must also include a statement affirming that the group does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, veteran status, or disability.
3. **OFFICERS:** At a minimum, all groups must have a president, secretary, and treasurer. Only currently enrolled, degree-seeking students may be officers. Each organization must have officers from at least three different Harvard schools. The constitution must:
 - List the titles and describe the responsibilities of each officer. The treasurer must be responsible for tracking and reporting all income and expenses, and for sharing that information in a timely way with the Supporting Unit or the Oversight Board or both, as requested. The treasurer’s responsibilities vis-à-vis the Supporting Unit are outlined in this *Handbook* in the section “Responsibilities of the Supporting Unit and the Organization Treasurer.”
 - Describe election procedures for officers, including a description of eligible voters.
4. **DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES:** The constitution must describe the group’s decision-making procedures, including the definition of a quorum.
5. **CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS:** The constitution must include procedures for amending it.
6. **ADHERENCE TO UNIVERSITY POLICIES:** The constitution should include a statement that organizing members and officers agree to abide by the [policies and](#)

[procedures of Harvard University](#). And the group must include a link in the constitution.

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

Harvard _____ Student Group
Constitution

Article I. Name and Purpose

1. The purpose of the Harvard _____ Student Group (H_SG) is to engage students from across the University in active dialogue about _____. The H_SG

Article II. Officers

1. The Executive Board of the H_SG shall consist of all H_SG officers.
2. The H_SG shall have the following elected officers: President, Treasurer, Vice President for Programs, Vice President for Communications, and Secretary.
3. Officers shall serve terms starting ____ in the year of their election and ending ____ following year.
4. Officers may serve no more than three terms in the same position.
5. If the President is unable to fulfill his or her duties, the Treasurer shall assume the presidency until a Special Election can be held.

Article III. Executive Board Operations

1. The Executive Board shall meet at least once per month during the academic year. The President may cancel meetings.
2. The President may call a special meeting of the Executive Board with 48 hours notice.
3. A majority of the members of the Executive Board will be considered a quorum.
4. Decisions of the Executive Board will be made by majority vote.
5. The Secretary shall keep minutes of all Executive Board meetings. Minutes shall be made available to H_SG members for review.
6. The Executive Board will hold a meeting for the full membership of the H_SG at least once per semester. Members will be informed of the date of meetings for the full membership at least two weeks in advance. The purpose of meetings for the full membership will be to inform members of H_SG activities, solicit suggestions and concerns, and bring important matters to the attention of the membership.

Article IV. Vacant Offices

1. Any office vacated between June 1 and January 1 will be filled by a special election, as described in Article VI (6).
 - a) If no candidates stand for a special election, a vacant office may be filled by a majority vote of the Executive Board.
2. Any office vacated between January 1 and May 31 will be filled by an individual elected by a majority vote of the Executive Board.

Article V. Membership

1. All graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a degree-granting program at Harvard are eligible for membership in the H_SG.
2. Membership shall be defined by subscription to the official H_SG email list.
3. Membership lists will be maintained by the Executive Board.

Article VI. Elections

1. Elections shall be held annually in April.
2. All individuals who are members of the H_SG at least two weeks prior to the election shall have one vote in H_SG elections.
3. Election Officer
 - a) Elections shall be managed by one officer of the incumbent Executive Board who is not a candidate for an Executive Board position. This individual will be referred to as the Election Officer.
 - b) If no member of the incumbent Executive Board is eligible to serve as Election Officer, the Executive Board shall appoint, by majority vote, one H_SG member to serve as the Election Officer.
 - c) The Election Officer shall announce an election to the full membership of the H_SG at least one month before the election.
 - d) The Election Officer shall set the deadline for candidates to announce their candidacy.
 - e) The Election Officer shall announce the final list of candidates to the membership no less than one week before the election.
3. Candidate eligibility

- a) All H_SG members with a full year of enrollment at Harvard remaining are eligible to run for a H_SG Executive Board position.
 - b) No individual may hold more than one H_SG Executive Board position at a time.
4. The candidate with the highest number of votes for an office shall be elected.
5. Special elections will be held to fill Executive Board positions vacated between June 1 and January 1.
- a) An Election Officer for a special election will be appointed by majority vote of the Executive Board.
 - b) The Election Officer shall announce a special election to the full membership of the H_SG at least two weeks before the special election.
 - c) The Election Officer shall announce the final list of candidates to the membership no less than three days before the special election.

Article VII. Amendments to This Constitution

- 1. An amendment to this constitution may be proposed by any H_SG member.
- 2. Amendments are approved by a 3/5 vote of the Executive Board and 3/5 of those present at the next meeting of the full membership.

Article VIII. Enactment

- 1. This constitution shall become effective on adoption by a unanimous vote of the full Executive Board.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPPORTING UNIT AND THE GROUP TREASURER

Each University-wide student group must identify a “supporting unit” to provide it with limited administrative support – primarily support with financial transactions.

Ordinarily, supporting units will provide support to only one University-wide student group. No entity at Harvard is obligated to serve as a supporting unit. The decision to serve as a supporting unit for a University-wide student organization rests solely with the unit itself, and agreement to serve does not represent a commitment to funding the organization’s activities. Schools, and Deans of Students at Schools, cannot serve as supporting units.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPPORTING UNIT

PROCESSING FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS

Recognized student organizations in good standing at Harvard qualify for a student organization account at the Harvard University Employees Credit Union (HUECU). Most University Student Groups handle the bulk of their often minimal financial transactions through these student-managed bank accounts. However, Occasionally at Harvard, a recognized student organization may receive an internal award (e.g., from a dean’s office) for a particular activity (e.g., a conference or lecture for students, not routine operating income). At these times, the other unit may only agree to contribute funds to the students’ activity via an internal 33-digit billing code transfer. In these situations, the student organization will need assistance from their supporting unit. In these cases (where a check is not an option), a member of the supporting unit will receive that internal transfer into an account they will manage and will disburse those funds on behalf of the student organization toward expenses attached to that particular activity.

- In cases where funds have been transferred internally, the supporting unit will produce financial reports for the group as necessary. NOTE that these reports are unlikely to be a full accounting of the group’s financial activities. It is the responsibility of the (student) Treasurer to maintain the group’s balance sheet.)
- The supporting unit may institute local budget oversight mechanisms as necessary.
- A supporting unit may reject funding intended for the group if, in the sole opinion of the supporting unit’s Finance Director or other relevant official, the funding contains restrictions or conditions that are unacceptable to the supporting unit.

ANNUAL BUDGET REVIEW

- All applications for University-wide status require an aspirational budget projection (a projection for first-time applicants; a summary of the past year and projection for the next year for applicants for renewal). Please note that this is a planning exercise, not a budget request. The supporting unit will produce reports for the group as needed for these applications and should review the budget submission in advance with the organization’s Treasurer.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GROUP'S TREASURER

- The Treasurer is responsible for maintaining complete and accurate financial records for the group. The Treasurer should note that the supporting unit will not be able to provide comprehensive, reconciled financial statements, and that the reports the supporting unit provides on the group's financial transactions may not reflect all of the group's financial activity.
- The Treasurer is responsible for requesting that the supporting unit process financial transactions in a timely manner, as defined by the supporting unit.
- The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that the group has sufficient balances to cover all requested expenditures.
- The Treasurer is responsible for adhering to any restrictions on funds received. It is not, in other words, the responsibility of the supporting unit to check on fund restrictions.

GROUP NAME

The name of the group should a) communicate all or most of the group's purpose, and b) meet Harvard's student group name guidelines, as described below and in the Application Form.

If a student group wishes to change its formally recognized name, it must submit a letter to the Oversight Board including the following:

- Explanation of why the group is requesting a name change.
- Indication that the group's members and officers approved this change.

The Oversight Board will review the proposed change in conjunction with the Trademark Program.

USE OF THE HARVARD NAME AND INSIGNIAS

University Student Groups may use the unadorned Harvard VERITAS shield. Groups must consult with the Trademark Program about the proposed use of any other Harvard University shield/logo or about the creation of a new shield/logo or insignia-based products as well as the use of the Harvard name in electronic contexts (e.g. URLs).

Groups must clearly identify their student status and their affiliation with Harvard on all material relating to their activities (websites, publications, posters, brochures, etc.) by using the phrase "An Officially Recognized University-wide Student Organization" in a prominent fashion. Views expressed by student groups are independent and not reflective of the view and opinions of Harvard University as a whole.

All use of the Harvard name and insignias is by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Groups must abide by all the policies and guidelines that govern the use of the Harvard name/logos (as well as all other relevant [University policies](#)).

Harvard Trademark Program Policies:

- [The Use of Harvard Names and Insignias](#)
- [Use of Name in Electronic Contexts](#) (URLs, etc.)
- [Endorsement Guidelines](#)

[Other University Policies](#)

[University-wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities](#)

DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

Student members of a recognized University-wide group will be held accountable to his/her home School's code of conduct. If questions of conduct arise for a group of students from multiple Schools, the relevant deans of students will collaborate on disciplinary measures.

Other Policies

MASSACHUSETTS HAZING LAW

A section of the application form requires the signature of two officers agreeing, on behalf of the group, to comply with the Massachusetts Hazing Law.

NON-DISCRIMINATION CLAUSE

Membership in this organization shall be open to all students regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, veteran status, or disability. See also the [Non-discrimination and Bullying Policies](#).

LOCAL AUTONOMY

The University requires student organizations to maintain local autonomy. The criterion for local autonomy shall be whether the University-wide organization makes all policy decisions without obligation to any parent organization, national chapter, or charter.

INDEPENDENCE CLAUSE

No organization shall in any publication, radio or television broadcast, public performance, or other venue purport to represent the view or opinions of Harvard University, or its body.

OPEN DEBATE PROTEST AND DISSENT

See the [Current Procedures for Permitting of Campus Protest Activity](#)

Harvard University is committed to open and civil discussion. Listening to and learning from others is fundamental to the educational process and essential to our mission of improving public policy and educating visionary scholars, innovative educators, and creative leaders. The [Harvard University-Wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities](#) recognizes the right of University members to demonstrate in an orderly fashion and to advocate and publicize their opinions in writing and orally—even if others find their speech distasteful or offensive—provided that the speech does not consist of true

threats, obscenity, or incitement to imminent violence. And yet, the exercise of this right must respect: (1) the rights of others to exercise their own freedom of speech and academic freedom and to enjoy freedom from personal force and violence and freedom of movement; and (2) the ability of community members to perform their duties and activities without interference. Toward fostering an environment of open and civil discussion, and to ensure safe events, this University Student Groups policy frames the expectations for members of the University Student Groups during events, meetings, and other gatherings apart from class sessions, including without limitation peaceful protests or demonstrations,¹ when speakers or participants express their views anywhere on or adjacent to the Harvard campus or any location owned, leased or used by Harvard (collectively, “Events”).

(In class sessions, the expectations for conduct set forth in [School handbooks](#) apply; note that any form of protest that disrupts a Harvard class would violate the *University-Wide Statement of Rights and Responsibilities* prohibition against interference with the performance of the “normal duties and activities” of the University.)

DISSENT

The right to dissent is the complement of the right to speak, but these rights need not occupy the same forum at the same time. Speakers at Events are entitled to communicate their message to an audience during the allotted time, and all members of the audience are entitled to hear the message and see the speaker during that time; therefore, dissenters must not substantially interfere with a speaker’s ability to communicate or an audience’s ability to see and hear the speaker. Dissenters are entitled to express their objections in other ways. When an Event is closed, dissent by non-attendees is limited to activity outside the Event that does not impede access to the event or substantially interfere with communication inside; when an Event is open, the acceptable form of dissent depends on whether a dissenter is inside or outside the Event and on whether the dissenter is acting before, after, or during the Event.²

¹ “Protest” and “Demonstration” are used interchangeably to mean a gathering of people with the intent to express a particular point of view in a manner that attracts attention, such as marches, speeches, rallies, sit-ins, vigils, pickets, or similar forms of expression.

² “Closed” events include those requiring an invitation or registration to attend, as well as Events not advertised on a public calendar. For closed Events, the unauthorized sharing, swapping, stealing, or other misuse of registration information, Zoom details, name tags, and the like is a violation of this policy.

PROTESTING AND DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE

Protesting in an orderly way or distributing literature outside an Event is acceptable unless it impedes access to the Event or substantially interferes with communication inside the Event. In order to facilitate both dissent and access to the Event, the University or the Schools may designate certain areas in close proximity to an Event in which protests may occur. Distributing literature inside an open Event is acceptable before the event is called to order and after the Event is adjourned, but not during the speaking portion of the Event.

SILENT OR SYMBOLIC PROTEST

Displaying a sign, wearing symbolic clothing, gesturing, standing, or otherwise protesting noiselessly inside an Event is acceptable unless such forms of protest interfere with an audience member's view or prevent a speaker from effectively conveying their message. Therefore, persons displaying signs, standing for a prolonged period, or otherwise engaging in protest activities must take care not to obstruct the view of a speaker from the audience, including by confining these activities to the back of the Event venue.

NOISE

Responding vocally to a speaker, spontaneously and temporarily, is generally acceptable. However, chanting or making other sustained or repeated noise or interruptions in a manner that substantially interferes with the speaker's communication is not permitted, whether inside or outside an Event.

FORCE OR VIOLENCE

Using or threatening force or violence—such as damaging or defacing a sign, assaulting or intimidating a speaker or any other person at an Event—is never permitted.

RESPONSIBILITY OF AN AUDIENCE AND HOST

An audience and a host (including a host organization) must respect the right to dissent. For example, audience members should not attempt to remove signs that are not blocking the view of a speaker or shout down a questioner before a question reasonably has been finished. Anyone who substantially interferes with acceptable dissent is violating these guidelines as much as a dissenter who violates the rights of a speaker or an audience member.

QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

Speakers invited to University Student Group events must agree to take questions from the audience at some point during an event. An Event's host can determine the best format for an event, as long as there is a meaningful opportunity for audience questions

MODERATOR ROLE

The University or Schools may determine, or a group may request, that open and civil discussion at an Event requires the use of a moderator, in which case University Student Groups must designate a neutral and non-partisan moderator in consultation with the host. A moderator generally will be a member of the Harvard faculty or administration. At the meeting, the sponsoring organization must introduce the moderator, define their role, and articulate that their presence reflects no position for or against the views of the speaker or sponsoring organization. The moderator's tasks include implementing this policy and respecting the University or School's expectations for protecting free speech. In carrying out this role, the moderator should be aware of the danger of curtailing free speech because of audience dissent and should act at all times as a neutral arbiter. Decisions at the Event about how to balance the rights of a speaker with the rights of dissenters will be made by the moderator or other officials designated by the University or Schools. Such decisions may include, without limitation:

- instructing a speaker to refrain from the use of slurs or epithets;
- ejecting a disrupter from the Event;
- moving an Event because of disruption or for security reasons;
- declaring an open Event to be closed;
- canceling an Event because of a clear threat of physical violence or to University property.

Failure to comply with requests by these moderators or other officials would be a violation of this policy.

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

In addition to complying with any other School, Department or Unit requirements for putting on an Event, the organizers of: (a) any Event with a high-profile speaker or guest, a speaker or guest perceived as controversial, or any other Event likely to generate protests; or (b) any Event consisting of a protest or demonstration are required to register the event through University or School-based authorities ordinarily at least three days before the Event is to take place. The registration will identify the organizers; the nature of the Event; the date, time, and location (including whether the Event will be at a single location or take place in multiple locations); and the expected attendance size. In extenuating circumstances, organizers may seek to register an Event fewer than three days before it is to take place. In such cases, in addition to providing the information listed above, the organizers will provide an explanation of the extenuating

circumstances. Registration will not be denied based on content, subject matter, or viewpoint.

ADVANCE DISCUSSION FOR REGISTERED EVENTS OR DEMONSTRATIONS

Once an Event is registered, the University or School-based sponsor will be in contact with the organizers to discuss the specific parameters of the Event. This will include identifying the onsite persons who will be in charge at the Event on behalf of the organizers, the methods for advertising the Event, the need for security to protect the safety of participants and passersby, the need for modifications to the planned Event (e.g., time of day, time of the academic year (for example, whether the Event is planned to take place during reading or exam period), and noise level), and the need for other support and resources.

USE OF HARVARD NAMES

Event organizers must comply with the *Policy on the Use of Harvard Names and Insignias* and any other applicable School or University policy.

PRIORITIES AND PRACTICES

When Events take place, safety is our highest priority. Regardless of the nature of an Event, decisions about whether to intervene in any way will be based on this principle and will reflect the best judgments of Harvard administrators and security officers in the moment.

EXPECTATIONS FOR CONDUCT

Event participants are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the *University-Wide [Statement on Rights and Responsibilities](#)* and any other applicable School or University policy. Additionally, the following conduct guidelines apply:

- Participants may not block or otherwise interfere with the free flow of vehicular, bicycle, or pedestrian traffic. The right of way on streets and sidewalks must be maintained.
- Participants may not block or otherwise interfere with ingress and egress into and out of campus buildings.
- Participants may not obstruct, disrupt, interrupt, or attempt to force the cancellation of any event or activity sponsored by Harvard or by any users authorized to use Harvard facilities.

- Participants may not engage in physically abusive, threatening, or intimidating conduct directed at any person.
- Participants must comply with the directions of any University officials acting in the performance of their duty.
- Disruptions to academic activities are unacceptable. Events may not disrupt, interrupt, or impede teaching and learning, including without limitation, classes or other scheduled activities.
- Use of public address systems and amplified sound is not permitted without prior approval.
- Harvard property must be respected at all times.

CONSEQUENCES

Violations of this policy, Harvard's [University-Wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities](#), and/or any other applicable School or University policy will be subject to review and may result in disciplinary action or other sanctions.