

University of Melbourne Student Union

Minutes of meeting 5(16) of the Constitutional Working Group

10:00 AM, 18.4.2016

OB Space, Union House

Attendance: Ella Shi, Sarah Xia (Welfare Officer), Sasha Chong, James Bashford (General Secretary), Adriana Mells (Wom*n's Officer), Itsi Weinstock (Activities Officer), Cass Prigg, Tyson Holloway-Clarke (Indigenous Officer), Yan Zhuang (Welfare Officer).

Items discussed:

1. General Changes

Section 49.1 (a) of the constitution contains a typo, stating that there are 18 voting members of council but identifying 20 positions (this was not updated when council was expanded in 2013 to include a disabilities rep and extra general rep).

The definition of the International Students Department contains an outdated reference to "MUOSS" now known as UMSU International.

Calendar typo.

The Activities department aims and objectives were also raised – these are outdated. Eg: reference to a MUDfest Steering Committee which doesn't currently seem to exist, traditionally MUDfest is the purview of the Creative Arts Department.

2. Consultation

-James outlined idea for a survey to seek further input from students, including demographic questions to allow results to be analysed by demographic.

-Discussion about the struggle of engaging students when there is a general sense of apathy to most things, let alone a constitution. Concern was raised that most students don't understand the process underway, the changes proposed or the history behind why things are the way they are now.

-Ella suggested posters around Union House for better promotion.

-The name "Constitutional Working Group" was raised as pretty uninteresting, perhaps snacks would encourage attendance.

-James added that focus groups with incentivised attendance may be a possible way to get more consultation in future.

-Discussion was held around whether quorum should be reduced for general meetings, both reducing the current quorum and continuing the practice of holding meetings at BBQs have issues,

though it was noted forcing meetings to be held in public under public scrutiny is important and desirable

-It was suggested the CWG could work better with clubs, especially cultural clubs for POC changes, for example.

3. People of Colour

-Sasha spoke to the changes developed by POC collective and identifies the definition as the hardest thing to develop. In its current form it reads as a list of what is included in the definition (Asian, African, arab, etc.)

-Aims & Objectives have been derived from the existing Queer aims

-Itsi asked about the distinction between ethnocultural and People of Colour and why one is more preferable, Sasha responded that it was better not to be so ambiguous as “ethnocultural” as this ambiguity could be exploited. Itsi said ethnocultural would be more inclusive of faith diversity but Sasha raised that “ethnocultural” can also exclude Australian born people of colour.

-Ella raised concern over how to ensure diversity between different groups within the department and ensuring the department isn't dominated by any one demographic. Sasha noted that the department itself must be active in ensuring it is itself diverse, in the same way the Wom*n's dept. has ensured it is more inclusive of women of colour and trans women. James suggested that this principle could be added as another aim and objective.

-Sasha reiterated that whether individuals chose to identify as a person of colour is highly personal and that there is no intention of policing identity to determine ability to be involved in the department.

-Student's Council representation was discussed as another single member position would reduce the proportion of proportionally elected general reps. There was little support for removing autonomous reps from council as these positions ensure a minimum of representation. It was noted that the issue with autonomous reps isn't that they exist but the way in which they are elected. Ie: They often ultimately represent their ticket rather than their constituency. The possibility of applying affirmative action for each group was raised but seen as impractical.

-James noted concern that this would raise the quorum requirement of council to 12 when it is already often difficult to reach quorum. It was discussed that perhaps quorum could be 50% rounded up rather than 50% +1 rounded up (ie: 10 out of 20 instead of 11 out of 20) and that attendance requirements should be strengthened.

-In regards to the definition, it was adapted from the Women of Colour collective definition. James asked if definitions used by other organisations had been considered but very few definitions already exist.

-Sarah explained the process of consultation. Changes have been developed through the people of colour and women of colour collectives. Ella again suggested that cultural clubs could be asked for further input. Sarah noted that a petition has also been circulated and received over 150 signatures and raised awareness about the changes.

-James noted his concern at the short timeline left in the semester to finalise the changes.

4. Women's Department Changes

-Adriana introduced the changes she has developed with the Women's collective in a separate women's constitutional working group.

-Changes include increasing AA to 50% rounded up, changing definition of "woman" and voting eligibility, removing the asterisk form "wom*n" and two changes raised by the collective: AA for women of colour and AA amongst office bearer positions.

-On the definition: changing this and opening up eligibility has a risk of being exploited. Possible solution is requiring candidates to sign stat decs in order to nominate, as is done at National Union of Students elections. This wasn't seen as overly desirable but a reasonable step to take. Ella noted that the benefits of making the department more inclusive of trans women far outweigh the risks of others taking advantage of the changes.

-On AA within OBs: Ella asked if this was a current issue? Only 1 department had two male OBs both this year and last year. It was noted that this may not always be the case when there is no protection against it.

-James raised the tight timeframe to get these changes through in time for the next elections and whether all changes would be ready. Adriana said that each change is equally important and all should be put forward as soon as possible.

-Adriana noted that an additional potential change had been raised with her by Yasmin (C&S Officer) about possibly ensuring the position of president isn't always a man. There is no proposal on this at this time and will need to be discussed in future as a longer term reform.

5. General Discussion

-Tyson raised a proposal to extend term limits to encourage OBs to stick around longer and continue contributing.

-Itsi argued that UMSU should encourage new people to be involved and that this would reduce the number of people able to be involved. Tyson responded by asking if OBs need to be more experienced. He acknowledged the issue of reducing accessibility but on the flip side said this would enable longer term planning and relationship building. In his experience of informally introducing 2 year staggered terms in Indigenous dept. this had allowed for stronger handover.

-Sarah raised concern over the practicality given the realities of politics and how this would work in theory versus in practice, particularly if OBs from opposing tickets were elected to the same office. Itsi added that while this would mean good OBs could stay around longer, it would also mean bad OBs would be around longer.

-James read out the relevant clause, R. 129.3: *A person who has been an Officer (in one or more positions) for two terms of Office (excluding an Officer filling a casual vacancy) in UMSU and MUSUI cannot stand for an Officer position.*

-Tangential discussion regarding Kyol Blakeney, 2015 Usyd SRC President. Tyson confirmed that Kyol was a nominee for Cleo Bachelor of the Year, did not win, but is still a bachelor.

-James suggested the proposal be further discussed by OBs at their next meeting and included in the survey for broader input.